



INTRODUCTION: We're walking with Dr. Luke as He describes the earthly ministry of Jesus. Today brings us to Ch. 17 of his Gospel. I have called this "*On the Pathway of Servanthood*"

Have you ever gotten involved with something and the people who helped you get involved painted it with such rosy images? *This is fantastic. You're going to love it.* But then after you involved yourself you found there was so much more to it and you weren't prepared? Have you ever said, "*Why didn't you tell me? Why did you not give me a clue that this was going to be like this?*"

JESUS HIGHLY COMMENDS SERVANTHOOD, but He also prepares us for some of it's shortfalls. He doesn't want us clueless.

Let's read the passage Luke 17:1-10

v.1a *Jesus said to his disciples*

Luke is very careful to tell us to whom Jesus is speaking to. He was just speaking to the Pharisees (ch. 16:14-15). Now He addresses his followers.

He talks about four related things in these ten verses:

- stumbling blocks
- forgiveness
- faith
- Servanthood

Four important and related subjects for those who are his disciples, and who are going to be his Servants. Servanthood has some obstacles and if we aren't aware of them we can get taken out of the game.

## I. STUMBLING BLOCKS

V. 1a - "*Temptations to sin are sure to come,*

The Greek word that here is translated "*temptation to sin*" is not the typical word for "temptation". That's why in different version it is sometimes translated offenses or stumbling blocks.

In the original Greek language of Scripture it's just one word, the word **Scandalon**. We get our word. Scandalous or Scandal from that word.

The word *scandalon* was actually a word that they used to talk about the little *trigger switch* in a trap. Something used to trap an animal. There was a little trigger, a stick, and when the animal going in hit that stick, it would get trapped. (like this **mouse trap**)

And so Jesus uses that word to talk about *causing someone to leave the path of discipleship and fruitful service to God.*

What does Jesus say about them? *They are SURE to*

*come.* You cannot go through life and escape problems.

**OTHER PEOPLE** can be that trigger switch. We will get to that. This is Jesus' focus.

But the ISSUES OF LIFE CAN ALSO BE A **STUMBLING BLOCK**

There will always be issues in your life that you won't be able to understand and can be a trigger to throw you off.

As I seek to understand God and seek to understand my life, as I look at my current situation it **will** be difficult to **understand how it all fits with his love for me.**

In other words there will always be things that will happen to cause me to say "*If God loves me then why did God allow this to happen to me?*" You can't escape that.

Sometimes I wonder, "**Why God doesn't do things MY way?**"

I've thought - *I'm pretty smart. I'm able to figure out what is best! . . . at least I think I am able. At least I thought I'm able.*"

The older I get the more I know that I don't know everything.

*"Okay, Dave, you think you're so smart, why didn't you buy Microsoft stock when it was worth almost nothing?" "No you didn't even know what was going to happen to Microsoft or you would have bought their stock, never mind something really important!"*

a. **We don't see the whole picture!** We don't know what's down the road. And so we often don't make the right decision down the road.

b. *But as I go down the road I often think I do.* And when things aren't going like I thought they should, I sort of **stumble** - "why is God not doing it my way?"

Corrie Ten Boom shared this illustration many times. Corrie was the survivor of a World War II concentration camp—sent there with her family for rescuing Jews, a story captured in an awesome book, *The Hiding Place*.

Corrie would display this. It looks like just a tangle of threads. She spoke about how, often, our lives seem like just a tangle. Mistakes, missed opportunities, and mixed motives.

Then she would turn the piece over to reveal a beautiful tapestry. "*What WE see is like seeing the back side of a beautiful tapestry that God is weaving in our lives. It's all about having the right perspective.*"

The Christian has a perspective on the mysteries of life (which are common to all) that the secular person cannot have. "*All things are working together FOR GOOD, to those who love God, and are called according to His purpose.*"

**And in this verse Jesus applies this primarily to PEOPLE who can put/be stumbling blocks on your road of following God.**

That is *sure to come* too. You can't stop people from

being people.

- a. Those that are always bringing up issues, raising doubts - "Well if God loved you . . . with all that's happening to you, how can you even think there's a God?"
- b. People who invite you join them in their gossip, slander, evil.
- c. Or in the church, people who rub you the wrong way, or misunderstand your motives, and you are *offended* and it results in you stepping away from God's path of service.

Jesus says, *be prepared*. But he also said "*but woe to that person through whom they come.*"

- *Woe* - Jesus is using the prophetic form of the Oracle of Doom - proceeded by the word "Woe." A word of Judgment from God, Woe to the man who would deliberately stumble others.

**v.2** - <sup>2</sup> *It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea ...*

millstone is a good sized stone.

When we lived in Plymouth, MA there was an old gristmill that was preserved and you could visit. Some of them can be small, but others could weigh up to 5, 6, 700 pounds. But I wouldn't want even the smallest one to have tied around my neck and then be thrown into the sea.

But here's what Jesus said. *It'd be better for you to have that done to you than for you to cause even one of his little ones to sin.* This is serious business.

**1. "Little ones" can refer to children** (as in Matthew). Jesus had a little child in his arms when he said it there.

I think one of the most beautiful things there is the pure, natural faith there is in children.

For a person to deliberately try to stumble the faith of a little child, I can't think of something more horrible.

- You know, it's probably PARENTS who children look up too, who are most likely to do this.
- children who see their parents "profess" faith and then live faithless. Bless then curse. Definition of hypocrisy

**2. "Little ones" also refers to believers, followers**, especially new and not yet mature ones.

Jesus pronounces a curse on those who mess with the new-found-faith of a new believer. The person who tries to destroy the faith and belief of a Christian, *woe unto him* -- better to be drowned in a horrible death than to be accused by God of doing this. **Strong words.**

## II. FORGIVENESS

The next two verses are about forgiveness.

The way this relates to the above verses is that we are now looking at the other side of the coin.

**v.3** *If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him*

Looking at someone, a *brother* who has *offended, stumbled* another, or it has happened to you, what are you to do? Two difficult action steps of a servant:

### 1. First you are to **rebuke** them:

If you see a person placing stumbling stones before others, you're to **rebuke them**: **You are to speak to them, warn them about their mistake** (not hateful, but strong and clear):

- *don't you realize you're causing them to stumble- by your actions, your attitude*
- *you shouldn't do that*

And while doing this we remember:

**Titus 3:2-6**– (ESV)

<sup>2</sup> *to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. (Why?)*

<sup>3</sup> *For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, ...*

<sup>4</sup> *But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,*

### 1. And if they **repent**, then you are to **forgive** them.

Forgiveness includes:

- choosing not to act on that action again
- choosing not to share it with others
- choosing never to bring it up again, when it's to your advantage.
- Praying for and seeking the person's best

These point to a forgiving heart. And the heart is all important, as Jesus said in Matthew 18:35—"unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

FOLLOWS REPENTANCE

Note that the forgiveness spoken of here in Luke follows repentance. *and if he repents, forgive him*

Forgiveness is only fully accomplished when the person forgiven has repented of their offense.

But does that mean we should not, cannot forgive a person who has not come to that place?

There is a sense in which **full forgiveness** is only possible in response to repentance.

But even when a person does not repent (cf. Matthew 18:17), *we are commanded to love our enemy and pray for those who persecute us and do good to those who hate us* (Luke 6:27).

John Piper: The difference is that when a person who wronged us does not repent ..., he cuts off the full work of

forgiveness. We can and should still lay down our ill will; we can and should hand over our anger to God; we can and should seek to do him good; but we cannot carry on through reconciliation or intimacy.

Puritan Thomas Watson said something very jolting: *We are not bound to trust an enemy; but we are bound to forgive him.* (Body of Divinity, p. 581)

But Oh, how crucial the heart is here. What would make “*I don’t trust you, but I forgive you*” an empty, unforgiving thing to say, is if in your heart you are really thinking this: “*I forgive you but I will never have anything to do with you ever again. I don’t care what you say or do, I’m finished with you.*” There’s no forgiveness in that. That’s playing games with biblical words, it is not a forgiving spirit.

Remember, this is the kind of forgiveness Jesus offered to us sinners at the cross. **Romans 5:8** *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* But the reconciliation between He and us comes only when we turn in repentance and receive his forgiving grace... If you haven’t received his grace, may you do it even today.

[HOW OFTEN?]

[v.4] – We conclude..*Oh bay, now that’s a little hard!* But we’re not done yet. We might think, *I’m willing to forgive... Once, a mistake*

◆ *twice* maybe - stupidity

◆ *three times, no way!*

**Luke 17:4** (ESV) *4 and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”*

Jesus said SEVEN TIMES! And another time when the subject came up Jesus said to Peter “*No Peter I said seventy times seven.*” In other words, forgiveness is not a matter of law or math, it’s a matter of heart and spirit - I must have a forgiving spirit.

### III. FAITH - vv. 5-6

**Luke 17:5** (ESV) *The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”*

No wonder they said “*Increase our faith.*” They realized they did not have the ability to endure under stumbling blocks, OR to rebuke in love and to forgive as we have been forgiven. They must have realized they couldn’t do what Jesus said they were to do.

**It’s true** - we can’t do what God wants us to do without God’s help. **We can’t be what God wants us to be without faith.** *I need the help of God. “Lord increase our faith.”* A great prayer. Probably one of the wisest things they ever asked God to do for them.

About faith, the Bible teaches:

- Paul says *were saved by grace through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God.* (Eph. 2:8)
- one of the gifts of the Spirit is faith - a gift (Gal. 5:22)

#### A. **One of our problems is we try to generate faith.**

We try to psyche ourselves up to have more faith. Ever try it? They didn’t ask that.

I cannot generate or produce faith. It is a gift of God. “*Lord, (You) increase our faith.*”

It’s not ours. We get it from God, not from ourselves.

That brings us to **v.6** *And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.*

This is often misunderstood. Jesus is not saying that the amount of faith that we have determines our ability.

I certainly hope not. Because a mustard seed is a very, very tiny seed, and Jesus said it’s enough to uproot trees or mountains.

So if it were size, then my faith is so small you would need an electron microscope to see it! - because I haven’t moved any trees around (some maple seedlings, but by sweat not by faith).

**But Jesus didn’t mean that.**

It is the **LIFE Principle** of the mustard seed that Jesus is getting at.

Yes a mustard seed is small and Jesus probably intentionally alluded to that. But the point is that, “*as small as it is, it’s not a speck of dust or dirt? It’s a living thing. It is alive. It has life.*

◆ Thus a mustard seed, though it be ever so small, *because of the life that it contains*, and because of it’s vital contact with its nourishing environment, it grows and grows until it becomes a large plant.

So if you have living faith, **faith that is alive that you have received from God, and is connected to it’s source - God** ....If you have a living faith in the living Lord -- then you can do things you could never do alone! Like endure stumbling blocks, and forgive. You can *move mountains*.

That, I’m sure he meant figuratively - there’s things much more important than *orchard rearranging* in life. But I’ve seen faith move the Mountains of life, time and time again! In my life and in others.

### IV. SERVANTHOOD - vv. 7-10

The next 4 verses are a picture of servanthood and they are described from the position of being a servant or slave of a 1<sup>st</sup> century household. (Probably a 1-servant household based on the story as Jesus told it.)

And remember, we are looking at what it means to be on the Pathway of Servanthood to God. So Jesus tells this story:

#### vv. 7-10

Jesus is not commending the practice of slavery, (no one has a right to play God over another – but it was part of their culture, and it served a good way to make His point)



**POINT:** If you're a slave of someone else, you don't expect that when you did your work in the field, the master is going to say, "*Great, thank you for doing that. Now sit down. I fixed you a nice dinner. Sit down and let me serve you. Later on I'll eat.*"

No way. (That sounds weird even in our day) The servant knows that he's the servant to the Master and if that means changing clothes and doing the next thing, that's what he does. (Some mother's here are thinking "I know exactly what that's about.")

- They knew it was the slaves DUTY to fulfill the commands of their masters. You're not looking for gushing thanks every day. You just serve.
- You serve. It's not extra, it's the norm.

### NOW THE APPLICATION

There are a lot of AWOL Christians in the church today because they do not understand the principles in this passage.

- Came to Jesus. Joined the family. Said "yes" *we want to serve Him*. But they miscalculated what that meant - and Jesus here has been telling us things that go along with being a servant.
- So they serve for awhile. They worked for God and at some point they get disillusioned and then they leave - and they are now on the sidelines - feeling unappreciated, unhappy.

Why? Because they did not take into account what servanthood includes. They didn't account for the type of things Jesus has been explaining. **They didn't account for:**

- The stumbling blocks that would surely come at times.
- The need to work alongside other flawed, sinners who like us, need loving gentle correction and forgiveness.
- Did not cultivate a LIVING, GROWING faith, rooted in the fertile soil of God, but instead rested on a initial trust.

**ALSO**, because they, somewhere along the line, forgot exactly WHO they were serving!

We serve a God who alone has the right to be served without ever thinking we've got something coming for us doing it!

When we forget this, isn't it true that when we serve, we often are looking for something back.

- Expecting praise for what we have done serving but we didn't feel we got it.
- For God to treat us special - "God after all I've done for you...."

In the church WE SHOULD recognize people and praise people for their service to God. We should appreciate their service to us.

But it is a subtle trap to fall into the place where you EXPECT it in order to continue to serve.

- it's God we serve, not others
- it's His thanks we want, not others

And when we have this attitude, then we realize that no matter how much we've done, we should say, "*Considering what he's done for me I haven't done enough for the Lord.*"

[BUT THEN]

And someday when we enter into glory, I still really have no right to expect to hear, "*Well that was simply marvelous Dave, now sit down here and I'll fix you a big meal.*"

But you know what? Though we shouldn't pridefully expect that, because of God's exceeding grace, **that's exactly what Jesus is going to do for us!**

### Luke 12:37 (ESV)

*<sup>37</sup> Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.*

This is *the marriage supper* in heaven. Totally unlike this world, God the Master will serve those who should be his Servants!.

Not only that - you are also adopted as a son and daughter, with an inheritance:

Gal.4: 7 <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Rom. 8:17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

### CONCLUSION

Christian, what will you do? Will you choose to serve, even with the cautions that Jesus tells you about that will surely come? Is it worth it?

It IS worth it.

Last week I asked you to make a covenant of growth and that covenant included Service and Servanthood. But it also included the Spiritual Tools to keep you rooted and grounded in God's presence and power. This text connects to that. Let's take it to heart.

### GOSPEL

Remember, what I said about forgiveness? That Jesus offered it to every person even *while we are still sinners, Christ died for us*. But the reconciliation between He and us comes only when we turn in repentance and receive his forgiving grace...

You receive His grace by Faith - trusting Jesus Christ to forgive and save you.

If you haven't received his grace, you can do it right now in this service. Talk to God in prayer as we conclude. Here's a prayer that you can pray...

*Dear Jesus. I know I am a Sinner. I know you are the Savior. Right now I turn from my sin and I turn to you in faith. Forgive me and make me Yours. Be my Savior and my Lord forever. Amen.*