

Owning a Faith That Matters

Session 6

February 25, 2024

**Maturing Faith**

**The Point:** Faith matures as we humbly obey God.

**Session Passage:** Luke 17:1-10

**Luke 17:1-4**

**Connection to The Point:** Our faith matures as we obey God in the call to forgive.

**He Jesus said unto his/ the disciples** (v. 1). The teachings Jesus presented in this passage, like those in Luke 12:22-34, were directed to His disciples, not to the crowd at large. Luke 17:1-10 consists of a collection of instructions. Their relationship to one another is not immediately clear. However, together they depict a mature faith that displays forgiveness, acts in harmony with God's purposes, and demonstrates humility.

**Offenses will certainly come/ Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come/ It is impossible but that offences will come** (v. 1). The term rendered *offenses things that cause people to stumble offences* literally refers first to the trigger or moveable bait-stick of a trap. Lured by the bait, an animal might touch this stick and be caught in the trap. The word later came to designate stumbling blocks or hindrances placed in people's ways to trip them up. Our word *scandal* derives from this Greek noun. Offenses will certainly come because we live in a fallen world, and we face temptations to sin.

**Woe unto the one/anyone /him, through whom they come** (v. 1). *Woe* expresses strong denunciation or grief. Here Jesus used the word to declare distress and disaster upon the person who functioned as an agent of temptation or who led others into sin.

**It would be were better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck /for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck /for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck** (v. 2). In the first century large donkey-driven mills were sometimes used to grind grain. Such mills consisted of a lower stone and a larger upper millstone. As the miller fed grain into a central hole in the upper stone, it gradually worked down between the stones as the upper millstone rotated. The resulting flour fell from between the stones onto a skin or cloth. The large upper millstone might weigh hundreds of pounds. A person cast into the sea with such a stone around his neck obviously would drown.

**Than for him to cause one of these little ones to stumble/ Than that he should offend one of these little ones** (v. 2). Who were the *little ones* to whom Jesus referred? Some Bible scholars think the designation refers to believers in general. Others hold the term more specifically denotes weaker Christians. Yet others view the *little ones* as designating such individuals as lame, blind, widowed, or poor individuals—the kind of people who received special emphasis in Luke's writings. In any case Jesus issued a severe warning to those who by example, words, attitudes, or neglect of duty spiritually harmed others. Furthermore, in giving this warning Jesus did not suggest those who allowed themselves to be so negatively influenced were excused from their own guilt. Rather, here He focused on our responsibility to avoid leading others into sin.

**Be on your guard /Watch yourselves /Take heed to yourselves** (v. 3). This imperative can conclude Jesus's warning recorded in verses 1-2 or introduce His words in verses 3-4. The former connection is more likely. The verb form indicates the need for continual alertness. In the nautical world, the term originally was used of bringing a ship to land. The task required careful attention, so the ship did not encounter rocks or shoals. Thus, the expression developed the

meaning of devoting the mind to or giving attention to something. Such concentration required diligent thought and effort. We might paraphrase Jesus's words as, "Watch out!" or "Pay attention!"

**If your brother or sister sins/ If thy brother trespass** (v. 3). With the designation *brother or sister*, Jesus indicated a situation where one Christian sins against another. This phrase in the original language expresses something that is not taking place at the present time but will likely occur in the future. We might explain Jesus's meaning as follows: "If your brother or sister sins and he or she probably will." The verb rendered *sins trespass* basically means "missing the mark." It also conveys the ideas of wandering from uprightness or violating God's law.

**Rebuke him them** (v. 3). Jesus's instruction reminds us that we are to call attention to the sinning brother's offense to the person's face rather than behind the person's back! Jesus intended a loving admonition designed to restore the believer.

**If they repents, forgive him them** (v. 3). The goal of the rebuke is the sinning brother's or sister's repentance and restoration. Thus, the disciple who issues the reproof must aim at persuasion rather than condemnation. In Galatians 6:1, Paul reminded believers we are to restore the repentant sinner gently, watching out that we aren't tempted. We need to compassionately remember we are fallible people who can easily fall to temptation. The verb rendered *repents* literally means "to perceive afterward" and thus "to change one's mind or purpose." In the New Testament it always involves a change for the better. The word translated *forgive* more literally means "to send away." God provided a graphic picture of sending away sins in the Day of Atonement ceremony. The high priest confessed the people's sins over the head of a live goat. That goat was then led (sent) away to be released in the wilderness, symbolizing the carrying or sending away of the Israelites' sins (Lev. 16:21-22).

**Seven times in a day** (v. 4). With this expression Jesus taught us to demonstrate unlimited forgiveness to a repentant fellow Christian. The number *seven* and its multiples symbolizes completeness or perfection in Scripture. Peter presumed he was being generous in suggesting he should forgive another believer seven times. Jesus, however, responded with "seventy-seven times seven" (Matt. 18:21-22). We are to offer limitless forgiveness, beyond keeping count.

**You must/ Thou shalt forgive him them** (v. 4). We are to keep on forgiving, not keeping score. We may be required to forgive beyond our tolerance level. Recall the words of the Model Prayer: "Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone in debt to us/ Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us/ Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us" (11:4). Remembering how God has forgiven us should help us forgive others (Eph. 4:32). A mature faith forgives.

#### **Luke 17:5-6**

**Connection to The Point:** Mature faith is not based on size but on obedience.

**Apostles** (v. 5). The term literally means "one sent out." Thus an apostle was a delegate, a messenger, one sent with orders or a commission. The designation specifically identified the Twelve whom Jesus chose, sometimes called disciples (Luke 6:13). These men had accompanied Jesus from the beginning of His ministry and were witnesses to His resurrection. The term also applied in a broader sense to other Christian leaders, including Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Timothy, and Silvanus (1 Thess. 1:1; 2:7). Additionally, Paul called himself an apostle (Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1). Although he had not accompanied Jesus during His earthly ministry, Paul received a direct commission from the Lord following His ascension to carry the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Gal. 1:1). The writer of the book of Hebrews recognized Jesus as "the Apostle and High Priest of our confession our apostle and high priest" (Heb. 3:1).

**"Increase our faith!"** (v. 5). Forgiving others can be challenging. The disciples assumed they needed more faith to have the ability to forgive. These followers recognized they needed divine strength to enable them to act in accordance with

Jesus's directives. The term rendered *faith* previously appeared in Luke 7:9. On that occasion Jesus marveled at the faith of the Gentile centurion who believed Jesus could heal his servant without His being physically present. This common New Testament word conveys the idea of trust or the firm conviction that someone or some claim is true. An individual's faith or personal trustful response to God's revelation of Himself in Christ results in salvation (Eph. 2:8-9).

**Faith the size of as small as a grain of mustard seed** (v. 6). Mustard is a large annual, fast-growing plant. Its hot-flavored seeds were proverbial for their small size. Jesus used the mustard seed and the large plant that grew from it to symbolize the rapid growth of God's kingdom from its small beginnings (Matt. 13:31-32). The Master responded to His disciples' request for more faith by telling them they needed not more faith but the right kind of faith. If their faith was a vigorous, living faith or a mature faith, no task would be too difficult. They could call on God in faith, and He would enable them to forgive. Even in small quantities genuine faith is powerful.

**Mulberry Sycamine tree** (v. 6). Bible scholars cannot precisely identify the particular tree Jesus had in mind. Apparently the tree possessed such an extensive and deep root system that a powerful force was required to uproot it. In any case the precise kind of tree to which Jesus referred is not the point. The point is that for any tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea requires a mighty act of God. And even faith as small as a mustard seed could result in such action.

**Be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it will obey you/ Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you** (v. 6). Clearly Jesus was not advocating the relocation of trees from one area to another by commanding them to move. Rather He was calling His disciples to realize the potential of their relationship with Him. He was urging them to exercise the faith they already possessed. The writer of the book of Hebrews detailed the kind of faith that pleases God by listing Old Testament examples of faithful individuals. By faith Abel offered an approved sacrifice. By faith Enoch did not experience death. By faith Noah built an ark to deliver his family. By faith Abraham obeyed God's call to journey to an unknown land. By faith Moses chose to suffer with God's people rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin. By faith Rahab the harlot welcomed the spies and was listed in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:5). These persons and many more all received God's approval through their faith (see Heb. 11).

When we live within God's will and pray for His will to be done, we can see marvelous things happen among His people. In daily practice such faith would not be directed toward performing physical feats like moving trees but rather would be channeled into preaching the gospel, ministering to others, and forgiving one another. Using a different word picture, Matthew recorded that such mature faith moves mountains (Matt. 17:20). It can even break down barriers in relationships created by unforgiving attitudes.

### **Luke 17:7-10**

**Connection to The Point:** Mature faith is a humble faith.

**Servant** (v. 7). In Luke 17:7-10 Jesus used the illustration of a dutiful servant to teach His disciples that mature faith does not seek recognition. Instead mature faith obeys the Lord without expecting to receive honor and rewards. The Greek term translated *servant* literally means "slave." Originally designating the lowest rung on the ladder of servitude, it became the most common and general word for servant. It depicts an individual totally responsible to and dependent on another.

**Tending sheep or plowing/ Plowing or looking after the sheep feeding cattle** (v. 7). In the agricultural society of first-century biblical Palestine, a servant's role frequently included tasks in livestock care or farming. A shepherd /One led sheep cattle to water and green pastures. He guarded the flock herd and protected them from wild animals. The first keeper of livestock was Abel, Adam and Eve's son (Gen. 4:2). Shepherding functioned as a primary occupation of the patriarchs and Moses. As crop cultivation increased, the task of shepherding fell to younger sons, hirelings, and slaves. Jesus used the analogy of shepherd and sheep to depict His relationship with His followers (John 10:11-18). The work of raising crops included plowing the soil. The first farmer was Adam, who tended the garden of Eden. His son Cain also worked the ground (Gen. 4:2). After the Israelites settled the promised land, raising crops became essential for survival.

The primary crops included olives, grapes, and grains. Jesus employed an analogy related to plowing in teaching about discipleship. Just as a farmer cannot plow a straight furrow while looking back over his shoulder, believers cannot follow Christ by focusing on past defeats and victories. We must instead focus on serving Him as we move forward at His command (Luke 9:62).

**“Come at once along now and sit down to eat”/ Go and sit down to meat** (v. 7). No slave master would think of inviting his slave to sit down to a meal after the slave returned from a day’s work in the field. Such thinking would be absurd.

**“Prepare something for me to eat my supper” / Make ready wherewith I may sup** (v. 8). After working hard all day, a servant could only expect more work to do when he entered the house. The master must be served dinner before the servant could satisfy his hunger.

**Does he thank that servant because he did what was commanded / Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do/ Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him?** (v. 9). The wording of this question in the original Greek language indicates Jesus expected a negative answer. In using this illustration, Jesus did not promote ingratitude. Rather, He pointed out that a servant received no special commendation simply for fulfilling his assigned responsibilities.

**In the same way/ So you also/ So likewise ye** (v. 10). Jesus moved to the point of His illustration. He compared a servant’s responsibility to his master with a believer’s responsibility to God. The example reminds us that we can never put God in our debt. Even if we were able to satisfy the demands of the law, we can never completely fulfill the obligations of love. When we have matured to the point we can serve God in wonderful ways, we must never become self-satisfied and think ourselves entitled to special honor. Even as it is unthinkable that a slave would expect accolades and rewards from his master so a believer should not expect special attention and honors from the Lord merely for performing his responsibilities. Far too often we even fall short of doing our duty.

**Unworthy /Unprofitable servants** (v. 10). The term *unworthy unprofitable* means “useless” or “good for nothing.” The word occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in Matthew 25:30 where Jesus described the man who buried his single talent rather than utilize it. Believers are unworthy unprofitable servants in the sense that when we have fulfilled our assigned obligations, all we have really done is what we should have done. All of our love, loyalty, time, and faithful service rightfully belong to the Lord because of all He has done for us. Paul expressed a similar truth in Romans 12:1: “Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.”

**We have only done our duty/ We have done that which was our duty to do** (v. 10). The primary Greek verb conveyed by this phrase basically means “to owe” or “to be indebted” to someone. From its basic meaning of owing money, the term developed the concept of an obligation to render honor or service due. The same verb appears in the Model Prayer in Luke 11:4 where Jesus taught us to “forgive everyone in debt to us forgive everyone who sins against us forgive every one that is indebted to us.” We are prone to think of ourselves as greater and better than servants. When we face such temptations, we need to recall Paul’s words in Romans 12:3: “For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one.” We need to remember that as Jesus’s disciples, He is the Master, and we are the servants. Sometimes we tend to get our roles reversed and think of God as the One who is to serve us. Although our sovereign Lord delights to bless His servants (Luke 12:35-37), we are, even at our best, forgiven sinners. We have no claim for merit with God. Our only hope is His grace. Mature faith motivates us to focus on Christ instead of ourselves. It compels us to humbly serve and obey Him.