

Sunday, June 16, 2024 | The Road to Redemption

Week 28 | Luke 17:1-10 | "Discipleship Proverbs"

Last week, we saw how Jesus' parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus dealt with money, hell, and, funny enough, A Christmas Carol. Like Jacob Marley, the Rich Man in Jesus' tale lived in the lap of luxury his entire life, ignoring the poor. And just as Marley found himself eternally bound in the chains of torment, the Rich Man wakes up in hell. And just as Marley haunted Scrooge, urging him to change his ways, the Rich Man, speaking from beyond the grave, urges us to abandon our uncharitable ways before it's too late. **A miser in this life will be miserable in the afterlife.**

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In today's passage, the Lord moves from one seemingly unconnected topic to another. In fact, the only common denominator connecting these diverse subjects is the disciples. Thus, Jesus' teachings here seem to be directed at his followers.

So, in a way, the principles we'll study today can be thought of as a collection of discipleship proverbs. Not unlike how some gurus relay a number of unrelated sayings, the Lord provides a variety of proverbial sayings to help us in a range of situations.

There are **three** takeaways from this passage:

- i. **Being drowned is preferable to being a stumbling block.**

**READ:** Luke 17:1-3a (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>And he said to his **disciples**, "**Temptations** to sin are **sure** to come, but **woe** to the one through whom they come! <sup>2</sup>It would be **better** for him if a **millstone** were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these **little ones** to sin. **Pay attention** to yourselves!

Just because temptations are unavoidable does not mean they're excusable. Should a person (in this context, a disciple) cause another to sin, the ramifications are **far worse** than we can possibly imagine. Jesus says it would be better if that particular disciple were **drowned** than that they should cause another to sin!

**We are duty-bound to bear one another's burden** (cf. Gal. 6:2). This doesn't only mean we should be there when a brother/sister is suffering; **it also means we should be mindful of the conscience** of our brother/sister.

Broadly speaking, there are issues in the Scripture that **matter of principle**, with no room for debate (e.g., salvation by faith alone, eternal security/damnation, etc.). But then there are issues in the Scripture that are **matters of conscience**, which leave room for debate. (For more on the specifics of this distinction, read *Find the Right Hills to Die On* by Gavin Ortlund.) And when it comes to **matters of conscience**, if we're not careful, our **liberty** can become a **stumbling block** to a fellow brother/sister. This is something we must guard against.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, addressed this very issue.

**READ: Romans 14:1 (ESV)**

As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.

Paul says we should not “quarrel over opinions,” and he provides two specific cases in which this principle applies:

**First, we should not quibble over matters of food.** Paul explains how, on one side of the debate, there's a believer who is a **vegan**, and on the other side, there's a Christian who eats **meat** (vs. 2-4). Neither one is allowed to pass judgment on the other in such matters.

**Second, we should not argue over matters of special days.** Paul explains how, on one side of the debate, there's a believer who esteems one day better than them all, and, on the other side, there's a Christian who esteems every day alike (vs. 5-6). And again, neither one is allowed to pass judgment on the other in such matters.

Unsurprisingly, there was bound to be trouble in the church in Rome, where so different people had varying opinions about such things. **So, after addressing the issues of food and special days, Paul makes a plea for peace.** After all, those who ate meat might be tempted to flaunt their liberty. They might eat a burger right in front of the vegetarians. Paul wants to keep that from happening because, in doing so, the meat eaters will become a stumbling block to their vegan brothers and sisters. **No matter the issue, such blatant disregard for another's conscience is always wrong.**

**READ: Romans 14:13-21 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put **a stumbling block** or hindrance in the way of a brother. <sup>14</sup> I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that **nothing** is **unclean** in itself, but it is **unclean** for anyone who **thinks** it **unclean**. <sup>15</sup> For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in **love**. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ

died. <sup>16</sup> So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. <sup>17</sup> For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup> Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. <sup>19</sup> So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

<sup>20</sup> Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. <sup>21</sup> It is good not to eat meat, drink wine, or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

Though our actions may not be sinful in and of themselves, if we cause another to sin, they have become sinful. **Those who have a robust conscience have a duty to guard the tender conscience of our fellow brothers/sisters.** Should a believer disregard this, in the words of Jesus, they should have “a millstone were hung around [their] neck and [be] cast into the sea.”

ii. **It takes less than a grain of faith to forgive.**

**READ:** Luke 17:3b-6 (ESV)

If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, <sup>4</sup> and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

<sup>5</sup> The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” <sup>6</sup> 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.

When we see our brothers and sisters overcome by sin, we have an obligation to “rebuke” them. Love corrects. We are, after all, our brother's keeper. Caring for one another means caring for one's physical and spiritual health.

But when we engage in correction, we must ensure that our motive is to build someone up, not tear them down. We want to offer constructive, as opposed to destructive, criticism. We want to help, not hurt. **Biblical correction is never destructive; it is always constructive.**

What's more, we must forgive every time. And to illustrate this, the Lord uses the idiom “seven times in the day.” An idiom is a word or phrase that uses *literal* imagery to express a *non-literal* concept.

For instance, when we say someone is a “social butterfly,” we’re not saying that person is an insect; we mean they will talk to everyone. Or, when someone wants “the whole ball of wax,” we’re not saying they want to make candles; we mean that they want everything. Or,

when we say that someone has “left no stone unturned,” we’re not saying they’ve upended some rocks; we mean that we searched *everywhere*.

So, when Jesus says that we ought to forgive “seven times in a day,” he is not saying that forgiveness is limited to seven times in a twenty-four-hour period; he means that we ought to forgive *everybody every time*.

Understandably, such teaching was a shock. In fact, the disciples respond by saying, “Increase our faith!” Even they saw that forgiving someone seven times a day would take more faith than they currently possessed. The Lord would have to give them a heaping dose of faith to do such an unthinkable thing.

But Jesus did not share their sentiment. He says, “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.” For Jesus to say, “if [emphasis added] you had faith like a grain of mustard seed,” implies the disciples’ faith was smaller than one of the smallest seeds on the planet. They wanted the Lord to “increase” their faith, and, in reality, they barely had any faith at all.

Which is greater? Planting a tree in the sea or forgiving someone seven times a day? Both tasks seem to be tremendously difficult. Arguably, however, forgiving someone seven times a day is possible at the very least. Planting a tree in the seas is, without a doubt, impossible. Thus, it is clear that Jesus’ comment is a **rebuke**. If they didn’t have enough faith to forgive, they didn’t have enough faith to do even the most trivial of miracles.

**READ:** 1 John 4:20-21 (ESV)

<sup>20</sup> If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.<sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

You cannot be a child of God and harbor bitterness.

**iii. Do not expect to be commended for doing what was commanded.**

**READ:** Luke 17:7-10 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup> “Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table?’ <sup>8</sup> Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink?’ <sup>9</sup> Does he thank the servant because he did what

was commanded?<sup>10</sup> So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'

Do not think you have done some great deed when obeying God. You have only done what was your duty and nothing more.

Otherwise, we'll begin to think that God owes us something. We'll start to expect special blessings for being obedient. Such thinking will turn a faithful Christian into an entitled Christian.

**READ:** Mark 10:28-31 (ESV)

<sup>28</sup> Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you."<sup>29</sup> Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel,<sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.<sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Following Christ requires that we give our very lives. Paul said we must think of ourselves as a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1). So, if we lose our lives, perhaps being martyred for the cause of Christ, may we not think that we've done anything special. Instead, may we say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty."

## **Video Description:**

### **The Road to Redemption | Week 28 | "Discipleship Proverbs" (Luke 17:1-10)**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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**Pastor's manuscript can be found here:**

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Season 38 | 28