

Watch Yourself for the Sake of Others

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[0:00] So, I invite you to turn to page 1041 in your pew Bible. Follow along in our gospel reading from Luke 17 this morning.

! The lectionary has verse 5-10 as our reading, but I find that as I looked at those texts, it's proper to read the first five verses of chapter 17.

In order to actually understand that short parable that Jesus tells in verses 7-10. So, it's important for us to look at the context.

First, I want us to notice that this section of Luke's gospel is directed to his disciples.

Jesus' conversation is directed specifically to his disciples. Not to the wider world. And so, I think how we read that, as we read this text, is that Jesus is talking to those who are in this kingdom.

[1:06] He's talking to the church here. We can see that in verse 1. He said to his disciples. And the parable that we have in our gospel reading concludes the section of teaching that Jesus has in verse 1-10.

But if we don't understand what Jesus is saying in verse 1-6, it will be difficult, I think, for us to actually understand what the parable is. Jesus, if you look there in verse 3, sort of the theme for this whole section is the command there in the beginning of verse 3.

Pay attention to yourselves. Another word to say is be on guard. On yourself. Watch yourself. This warning is at the center of this particular teaching to his disciples.

And he points out in this charge to watch themselves. He references, even the previous parables that he had told in Luke.

And I think if you look at verse 1-2, you have to think of the previous parable of last week of Lazarus and the rich man was in focus in light of what Jesus was saying there.

[2:26] He draws out the meaning there in verses 1-2. And then in verse 3-4, he draws out the meaning of the parable of the prodigal son. So, Jesus has been so far through Luke having these series of conversations in his journey from Jerusalem, from his journey to Jerusalem, with the Pharisees at one point, and another point with the disciples.

But it's with usually both of them present while he's having this conversation. But he directs his focus either to the Pharisees or he directs it to his own disciples. And we've seen that in the previous readings as we journey through Luke.

Here, he has the disciples in mind. But the disciples were there when he was telling the parables about Lazarus and the rich man. They were there when he was telling the parable of the lost things. The lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son. The parable of the prodigal son. And so, they knew what he meant by that. And even though Jesus was talking to the Pharisees in some of those earlier parables, there is a warning there for even his disciples.

As they hear Jesus' warnings to the Pharisees. And in light of that, his warning for those who will be part of his kingdom. So, he says, Jesus says to them, to his disciples in Luke 17, Temptations to sin are sure to come.

[3:50] Temptations to sin are sure to come. But woe to the one through whom they come. What Jesus is saying there, you might as well read that as, in the Greek, the temptations to sin are sure to come, really means it's impossible for temptations not to come.

It's a double negative, right? And so, it's saying it is impossible for the believer for temptations not to come. There will be snares. In fact, the word that is used for temptation there is the word snare or lure.

If you go fishing, you know what a lure is, right? You need a lure to be able to be successful in your fishing endeavor. If you are a hunter or you believe in these, I take a sort of interest in bushcraft.

When I say I take interest, I watch YouTube videos of bushcraft people. I don't, myself, go out there and do any of those things. But it fascinates me. Those people who do bushcraft and live alone in the woods by themselves.

And one of the things they do is not only do they hunt, they lay snares in the forest in order to catch animals, small game, rabbits, squirrels, and all those things.

[5:14] And it's a lure to lure the animal there and then to entrap the animal and to kill the animal for food, right? Think of that as Jesus uses this word temptation.

This means lures and snares are a fact of the Christian life. They are sure to come. Jesus doesn't paint a rosy picture of the Christian life. He gives us a realist picture of it.

The temptations are sure to come. It's impossible for them not to be present in the life of the believers. They're bound to happen.

They're inevitable. And they come in different forms. You ought to understand that. And they come in different forms for each one of us in the household of God.

What might be a snare for you might not be a snare for me. What might be a snare for me might not be a particular snare for you. But what is true and what is a fact is that we all have snares, lures that want to pull us away from God.

[6:16] And oftentimes you know people who are part of the body of Christ and no longer part of the body. Right? They've been pulled away. They've been snared away.

They've been lured away back into the world. Temptations are sure to come. But Jesus has a warning here. But woe to the one through whom they come.

Again, remember that Jesus is talking to disciples. He's talking within the church here. Right? So don't think out there, woe to those people in Hollywood that are putting snares. He doesn't have them in mind here.

He's talking to us. And he says, woe to the one through whom temptation comes. Might come. Jesus warns us.

Take heed. And this is why verse 3 is important. Because it says, pay attention that temptations do not come. You are not the means of ensnaring your brother or your sister in Christ.

[7:21] The word that Jesus even uses there is these little ones. Who are the little ones in the context of this passage? If you've been journeying through Luke so far, you know that Jesus has in mind those that are being called into his kingdom.

Those are the little ones. The lost sheep. The prodigal son. That's the little ones that Jesus is referring to. The blind, the lame, and the beggars that are invited to the banquet.

Those are the little ones. Those who are coming into the faith and coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

Those who are young believers. And in fact, I think, those who are not so young believers.

Before Christ, we are all his little ones. And he has us in mind when he says, woe to you if temptations to my little ones are coming through you.

And oftentimes, we've often read this passage to think, oh, yeah, you know, if you're a pastor, if you're a preacher, woe to you if you lead God's people astray.

[8:23] And we're right to think that. As I read this, I think there's a hearted burden as a minister of the gospel. Because the penalty for leading people astray from God is dire.

But I don't think it's only for pastors and ministers of the gospel alone. It is to all Christians. The responsibility lies with all of us.

We are responsible for one another. And the woe, the warning, is on all of us as well. That we are not means of ensnaring one another.

So, look at the picture there that Jesus paints. It will be better for him, this person, if a millstone were on around his neck and he were cast into the sea, that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.

Do you guys know what a millstone is? It's a grinding stone. And it's not just like a grinding stone. It's a mill, right? It's a big wheel of stone.

[9:30] And imagine this. A stone tied to this person's neck, rope attached to it, to the stone, and the stone thrown into the water. What happens eventually to the guy standing on the deck?

He goes the way of the stone. There is no saving you when you attach that millstone. And this is the picture that Jesus paints.

You are doomed if through you, you've caused one of these little ones to sin. And so the warning then is there.

Woe to you if you will cause any of these little ones to sin. By the way, look around you. Woe to you. When we say woe are the little ones and woe is responsible for woe, it's you are the little ones, but also you are the ones to woe.

You bear the responsibility. You bear the responsibility for the person sitting next to you. And the person sitting behind you. And the person sitting in front of you. And the person sitting across the room from you.

[10:38] Woe to you. Woe to you. If you should cause one of these little ones to sin. I think... So the warning there is verse 3.

Pay attention. Pay attention. Be on guard. There's a watchfulness that Jesus is calling us to. Be on guard for yourselves. And it's easy for us to pay attention, to watch ourselves, for ourselves' sake. Right? It's not a hard thing to say. Pay attention. Be on guard for yourself so that you are disciplined. You do your quiet times. You walk in...

You're reading your Bible. That's not what Jesus is saying. Those things are important too. But here he's saying, Be on guard. Watch yourself for the sake of these little ones.

For the sake of your brother and sister. Watch yourself so that you are not the means by which they are ensnared into sin. Watch yourself.

[11:43] Pay attention to yourself for the sake of the other. And he gives two examples in which we're to do that. So, it gives us...

Jesus kindly, graciously gives us the examples in which that happens. He says to you, to us, if your brother sins, rebuke him. And if he repents, forgive him.

And if he sins against you, he goes on in verse 4, if he sins against you seven times in the day and turns to you seven times saying, I repent, you must forgive him.

let's look at the first part of that. If your brother sins, rebuke him. That's not something that we love to do, is it? I don't know. Some people like that.

Maybe, you know, don't mind. I don't even mean like, but they don't mind confrontation. But I think for most of us, myself included, confrontation is not something that we, like, seek out. We don't want to ruffle the feathers.

[12:44] Even, we don't want to raise alarm. Even when we see something, it's like, oh, you know, it's not my place. Somebody else will do it. In the church, for example, we say, well, the pastor will do it.

Or the deacon will do it. Or the people on vestry, you know, will do it. Oh, well, that guy was the Bible study teacher. That's his job. I'm just, you know, Jesus is not making any demarcations here. He says, look, if your brother sins, if your sister sins, rebuke him. Rebuke her.

For what reason? For what purpose? To what end do we do that? Is it just to, like, you know, sinner, sinner, shame, shame. No, that's not it.

It's the point to draw them back. To bring them back to God. It's your responsibility when you see your brother or sister caught in sin.

[13:42] Rebuke them. It's not, it doesn't, so, if you, if your motive and the end to which you're doing it is to draw them back to God, then the manner in which you rebuke will, will, will be affected as well.

You will do it in love. You will do it with them in mind. You will do it graciously, but you will do it because you love them.

Right? You will do it because better that they should be ensnared into the world and head to destruction. If you truly love, love, how many of you, if your child is about to touch a hot stove or walk into open streets and says, well, you know, I don't, you know, I don't want to raise alarm. You immediately pull the child out of dangerous way. Well, that's the responsibility that we have towards one another. It's not an option here that Jesus says.

He says, if this happens, do this. Rebuke. And then there's an added to that. There's an added thing to that. Oftentimes when your brother sins and they need rebuke, it might be a sin against you, it might be a sin against the body itself, but you rebuke them and what have they done?

[14:56] They've repented. What are you called to do then? Forgive. Forgive him. Forgive him. Bendik?

Can you keep it down, please? And pay attention. Thank you. If your brother repents, if your sister repents, what are you called to do?

Forgive. And then Jesus expounds on that, right? Because oftentimes, yeah, we believe in forgiveness, but what about a serial offender? I mean, this person comes to our church, he's a young believer, and he's come from a wild, disillusioned life, and now he's come to faith in Jesus, but his speech is still like many.

Every other word is a curse word. He's rude. He's uncouth. Man, and you keep correcting him and correcting him, and he doesn't change.

And he keeps saying, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm going to do better, but he keeps, what does Jesus say to do here? Well, after the third time, write him off, because he's not going to change. No. Forgive and forgive and forgive and forgive because he repents.

[16:07] This person, this little one of mine who's come to faith is learning about me. He's coming and growing and being sanctified. Do not be the means by which he's ensnared.

What happens? Imagine if somebody like that was an Amis. Who is like, we don't have anybody like that, so don't think I have anybody in mind. But imagine if somebody was like that.

Who is like that? Who is just, you know, everybody is just, man, this guy, you know, it's just hard to deal with. It's just rough around the edges.

But what happens when that person is genuinely loves Jesus, has come to Jesus, but the work of sanctification, which is an ongoing work in all of us, is ongoing in him.

What happens if we, as his brother or his sister, says, well, you know, I'm just going to write you up. You've ensnared that person because you've cast them out of the kingdom.

[17:06] They're really not out of them, but you have, you've broken fellowship and communion and love with that person because of their sins. You've, with old forgiveness.

And so, by doing that, you've ensnared them. You've led them, imagine if the church then ostracized that person who's a young believer and he feels like he's no longer welcome in the body of Christ.

He goes back into the world, exposed again to sin. Rather than inviting him and continuing to forgive, as Jesus says here, and continuing to, and to disciple and to train and to pray and to rebuke when he starts sin, and over time the work of sanctification happens in the life of that person.

That's true for all of us here. To one, maybe to a lesser extent than the example I've just painted.

But that is the picture Jesus paints here. So if this were, if this were to happen, forgive him, forgive him, Jesus gives even up to seven times in a day.

I don't know anyone that actually sins against us seven times in a day, but Jesus uses it appropriately, even more than, really it's an appropriately, it's not like, okay, the eighth time, damn that's it. No, it's just saying as many times as I needed, forgive.

[18:22] But the apostles hear this, look in verse five, they rightly recognize how hard this is to do. It is hard. It isn't easy. And they recognize it. And they say, what's their response to Jesus?

Increase our faith. Give us faith. Increase our faith. But the Lord said to them, 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 would obey you.

It's not really the amount, the quantity of your faith, Jesus is saying to them. It's the quality of your faith that matters here. It isn't the quantity of your faith, but the quality of your faith.

Who do you have faith in? Who is the object of that faith? And if it is Christ, that's all you need. It might be even as small faith as small as a mustard seed.

It will be enough. So Jesus, in Jesus answering them, Jesus then tells them this parable. He says to them, will any of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep, say to him, when he has come into the field, come at once and recline the table.

[19:32] Now, most of us don't live in servant, you know, master cultures. This will be, but even we can maybe stretch our imaginations maybe to understand what Jesus is saying here.

How many of you have somebody that works for you and you've hired them for that purpose to provide service? Maybe even think of service industries where, you know, you go to a hotel or you go to a restaurant and somebody's serving you and then you say, oh, I mean, your feet are so, you've been working like, you know, three hours.

Come sit. Come sit next to me and you go in the kitchen and serve them. It seems absurd. Jesus is painting the picture there of, no, it's the person's job.

So, your servant doesn't go and do the work he's tasked to do in the field and then come in and you tell him, oh, yeah, set recliner table. No, you tell him, continue the job. Go make me, what does it

say there?

Prepare supper for me. Dress properly. Serve me while I eat and drink. And, the disciples who have heard that as you should tell them, say, yeah, of course. Of course.

[20 : 39] The master should expect his servant to serve. That's the point there. But Jesus turns the parable on its head by saying, you know, he changes the subject from the master to the servant.

The servant is not the subject. He says then, does he thank the servant because he did what he was commanded? No. The servant has just done his job or her job.

then he turns it on its head. He says to his disciples, you are the servants. You are the servants. So you also, when you have done what you were commanded, say, what?

We are unworthy servants. We've only done what was our duty. How do you see yourself in the household of God? We are servants in the household of God.

We are unworthy even at that in the household of God. We have been called by grace. We've been ransomed and given and invited into the family of God.

[21 : 46] We have no room for boasting. And when we have done what we ought to have done, which, by the way, is not rebuking and forgiving and sin and forgiving in the household of faith, as hard as that work is, seeing Jesus as the object of our faith, right?

Recognizing that because of his magnanimous love and grace and mercy and forgiveness, we ourselves, have been brought in to the family of God.

We ourselves are being sanctified and renewed and growing and increasing faith. When we recognize our own state and say we have no room to boast, then we can then in turn offer the same grace and forgiveness and love and mercy to our brother and our sister in Christ, within the body of Christ.

We can forgive and forgive and forgive as many times as necessary to do so. we have no claim. We're not like the older brother who comes to Jesus.

I hope that you can find yourself in this passage even as the little ones that Jesus says. Because as we read that and the list is there, the little ones are the blind, the lame, the crippled, the poor, Lazarus, sitting at the gate.

[23 : 14] those are the little ones that Jesus is referring to. Do you see yourself as one of them? I think it's the inability of the Pharisees in Jesus' tale to see themselves among this list that condemned them.

We are not the little ones. We have a claim, we have a right to be in the kingdom of God by their self-justifying. And that's the constant theme of this middle passages of Luke.

Jesus is saying you must come to God as a beggar. You must come humbled because it is the humble that he lifts while he puts down the proud.

So do you come? Do you come to God saying nothing in my hands I bring simply to that cross I cling? Or are you like the older brother in Luke 15?

Do you claim a righteousness of your own based on your own works? Are you here today because you need a physician? Do you recognize your need for a physician? Or do you think, well, I can heal myself?

[24 : 25] Only those whom God helps make it to Abraham's bosom. Remember a parable from last week. Only the Lazaruses are those who are called into the kingdom.

If you think you can help yourself into heaven, to your tragic surprise, you will be like the rich man. You are already condemned even by that very self-justifying posture before God.

You've already condemned yourself to hell and eternal separation from the promises of God. So the warning is here. Both the warning and the invitation is here in these passages.

you are the little ones. You are also responsible for God's little ones. Pay attention then. Be on guard.

Pay attention to yourself for the sake of your brother. Pay attention to yourself for the sake of your sister. God's This, as the disciples rightly see, needs faith from God.

[25 : 33] Needs power from the Holy Spirit. But he has promised to enable us to do so. Let us pray to him and ask him that he will continue to enable us and empower us.

Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you, Lord, for the fact that you brought us from the murray clay that we were in, rebellious, sinful, haters of God.

You made us your sons and daughters. You gave us a new name, a new identity, sons of the Most High. You justified us by the work of your perfect, righteous, holy son.

The punishment that was ours, you placed upon him. And you adopted us into your family. help us, Lord, to recognize that it is by grace that we are in the kingdom of God.

And help us, Lord, to extend the same grace and love and kindness and mercy to one another within the body of Christ. That we will freely forgive one another. That we will freely call one another back to Christ when the snares of the world are threatening to pull us away.

[26 : 55] That we will be bold and loving enough to do so. Lord, we recognize that we will undoubtedly sin against one another even at times.

And that temptation will come even from the world at times. But help us, Lord, not to be the means by which it comes. Help us, Lord, to watch ourselves, to be on God for us, on our own hearts, on our own motives, for the sake of one another.

Empower us in the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.