Being a Servant Disciple

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Preacher: Rev. Richard James

[0:00] Well, good morning. As I've told you before, I enjoy short statements and I saw a very clever street sign once, which I'll never forget.

It just said, two great truths. One, there is a God. Two, you're not him.
I found that amusing as I find most people who live in the first world do, but it occurred to me that the majority of people in the world who live in third world countries wouldn't get the joke.
Why? Because they actually do believe there is a God and they know that they're not him. It's only funny in places like Vancouver because we are a secular society.
I mean, many in Vancouver would question whether there is a God and if there is a God, I want his job. That's how people think in secular societies. In Vancouver, as well as Sydney, God is irrelevant.
[1:13] In fact, he's an embarrassment. Salvation from sin? Heaven in the sky when you die? That's religious nonsense.

In fact, it's offensive to call me a sinner? To talk about hell? 16 years ago, when Judy and I first came to Canada, we were introduced to what seemed to be quite distinctly a Canadian phrase. Very powerful phrase. It went something along like this. I am deeply offended by what you're saying. Deep offence seems to be the way of a secular society.
Unfortunately, in this rather politically correct climate, much of what Jesus says was and still is deeply offensive.
Did you hear what he taught us last week? He taught us about hell in quite graphic and real detail. If anyone is going to be offended by what Jesus says, it was then.
[2:30] Now you might ask, why am I talking about being offended? Apart from the fact that I probably may offend people, which is what preachers tend to do, the word to offend in the Bible is to cause to stumble.

It's to put a stumbling block in front of someone. And it just so happens that straight after the most offensive teaching Jesus gives on hell, the next two verses have the word, scandalizami or scandala, from which we get scandal or to scandalise.
It's a word that describes stumbling, causing offence. Now the reason I mention that is in Luke's Gospel he only uses it three times, each time from the words of Jesus.
And so I thought it was very helpful as we consider that he's just taught us about hell, he then starts talking about people being scandalised. But before we look at our passage, I thought it would be very helpful to look at the one other time that it's on the lips of Jesus about being scandalised, and it's just back a few pages in Luke.
If you turn back with me, we're in these blue Bibles you should find in front of you, in the back section on page 62. If you just turn to Luke 7. In this passage we actually see what the offence is, and what the stumbling block or the scandal is.
[4:08] And the context we're going to be looking at Luke 7 is John the Baptist. If you remember, he was the one that came and told everyone the Saviour was coming. But John the Baptist is now in prison.

And we're told in verse 19, John, calling to him two of his disciples, sent them to the Lord, saying, Are you he who is to come?
Or shall we look for another? Now, why would John the Baptist do this? If you recall, when he first met Jesus and baptised him, behold, the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sin of the world. I am unworthy to even untie his sandals. I baptise with water. He will baptise with the Holy Spirit. But now, why is he saying, Are you the one?

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Or should we look for someone else? Well, a lot has happened since Jesus came. And most poignant for John the Baptist is, he's been put in prison. He's been in prison for quite a while. [5:17] In fact, he is relatively confident that Herod will have his head, literally. So here is John the Baptist, who heard the message of the one who came.

One of the things that the Messiah would do would set the captives free. And yet here's John, in prison, and suffering, and I don't quite understand this, Lord.
Well, Jesus gives a reply to take back to John, verse 22. He answered them, Go and tell John what you have seen and heard.
The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the good news preached to them, and blessed is he who takes no offence at me.
Blessed is he who is not scandalised, who does not stumble on me. Yes, good and wonderful things are happening, John, but in your particular life, you are facing suffering, and yes, in fact, death.
[6:25] Blessed are you, John, if you are not offended by this fact. If following me means taking your life, blessed are you if you do not stumble. Blessed are you if you trust and obey me always.

Now, occasionally I hear people who say, I don't like bits of the Bible. Often the Old Testament's the first to go. And then if they're a little bit more widely read, or at least heard, they say, I certainly don't like this Paul guy.
And so all of Paul gets disappeared, and they finally say, the only bit I do like is Jesus. Have you ever heard this? Now, I often, there's a part of me that can't help smiling, because I think, do you really know what Jesus actually said?
If you want to be offended, Jesus was the one to do it. In our passage today, if you turn forward again to page 76, which will stay, Luke 17, if you were here last week, we heard Jesus teach about hell.
A rich man goes to hell. Jesus tells us the man is in torment, and calls for mercy, but doesn't receive any. Instead, this man is told he is getting what he deserves.
[7:41] He knew the Bible, Moses and the prophets, but he didn't trust and obey them. It's shocking. Still, if you like, with the ringing of him crying out for mercy, ignore the chapter break, the very next verse, Jesus turns to his disciples, and says in verse 1, he said to his disciples, temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to him by whom they come.

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. Take heed of yourselves.
The expression in verse 1, the temptation to sin, and in verse 2, to cause someone to sin, is from that word, scandalous, scandalise, to cause offence, to cause to stumble.
You can see it in the footnote. In view is the idea of trying to go the right way, but being tripped, someone actually making you fall. The original word was the stick that people would put to hold up a trap, which would be pulled out to catch an animal.
No doubt, Jesus' story about hell was scandalous to his hearers. A rich man going to hell with no hope of mercy.
[9:11] And so Jesus then turns to his disciples and says in verse 3, take heed of yourselves. Stumbling blocks, which prevent people from trusting and obeying Jesus, are inevitable.

Just make sure you don't cause them. Now what I'd like to do as we look at this passage is just briefly show you its structure. It has four paragraphs, and the first paragraph, which we've started looking at, has two parts.
The first two verses, he's basically saying, don't you cause offence. And the second two verses of the first part is, don't you take offence. We'll look at that in a moment.
The second paragraph is basically the saying, man, that's impossible. Give us faith to do it. The third paragraph from verse 7 is the really shocking slap in the face to first world Christians kind of teaching.
And then the fourth paragraph gives us an example. Now I guess having told you that, we're all interested in what's in the third paragraph. So let's look at that first in verse 7.
[10:18] And before I read it to you, there's two comments I'd like to make. First, every time you see in verses 7 to 10 the word servant, replace it with the word slave.

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The Greek word is doulos. It only means slave. I don't know why the RSV and the NIV put servant. The new RSV, the American Standard, the ESV, all acknowledge the word is slave.
Isn't that interesting? I wonder whether even the translators thought, we can't put slave. That's just too offensive. I don't know why. I don't know, but is that possible?
The pressure's there, isn't it? But the reason I want to point this out is, this passage, 7 to 10, only makes sense if the word is a slave. It only makes sense because only a slave has no choice but to serve his master.
Only a slave is owned by his master. Only a slave has no rights. They have to do what their master says and that's what this passage is saying.
[11:28] So follow with me from verse 7 and I'll replace the word servant with slave. Verse 7. Will any of you who has a slave ploughing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come from the field, come at once and sit down at table?

Will he not rather say to him, prepare supper for me and gird yourself and serve me till I eat and drink and afterwards you shall eat and drink? Does he thank the slave because he did what was commanded?
The answer is no. Then Jesus says, so you also. When you have done all that is commanded you, say, we are unworthy slaves.
We have only done what was our duty. Now verse 10, the last sentence, is the point that Jesus is making. When we do what Jesus commands us to do, we are simply to say, I'm not special, I'm unworthy, I've simply done what my Lord has commanded me to do.
Jesus is my Lord and Master. I am his to command. Becoming a Christian is not just receiving Jesus as my Saviour.
[12:48] Becoming a Christian is acknowledging Jesus is my Lord and Master. I have given him my life. He owns me. I must now trust and obey him.

In other words, to become a Christian could be described as becoming slaves to our Lord. Selling ourselves freely, gladly, completely, but absolutely.
I am his. Nothing less than his. You know, it's a paradox, really, that those who find this offensive haven't understood it.
They haven't understood it. It's a joy to be a servant of the Lord because his service is perfect freedom. Remember that phrase?
We prayed it this morning. Every time we have morning prayer, we pray the colic for peace. This is what it says. O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord in knowledge of whom stands our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom.
[13:59] That's what we say every week. Thank you, Lord. To serve you, to be your slave, is true freedom. Now, in our culture, that's offensive, in our culture, slavery only has a bad connotation.

so our culture gets rid of it. But, do not let our culture dictate to us what Jesus said and didn't say. Do not let our culture tell us the kind of Jesus they want to believe. There are people in this culture here in Vancouver that have buckled under the pressure of the outside secular society and they have tried to make Jesus less than he is.
Being a Christian is much more than being Christ's slave. Yes, it's wonderful with his family, with his church, with his, but it's not less than being his slave.
brothers and sisters, are you followers of Jesus Christ? He commands us to trust and obey him always.
[15:24] We have no choice. We belong to him and when we do, we're not to expect a pat on the back or some praise or a choir singing how wonderful we are.

I'm just doing my duty. All praise to him. He must increase while I decrease. Now, with Jesus as our Lord and commander, he commands us.
He tells us things. Let's look again at the first paragraph. In the first two verses, he is basically saying to us, do not cause stumbling, do not cause offence.
We are not to tempt people to sin. We are not to try and make Jesus an anemic, palatable, friendly, gentle Jesus that everyone can accept.
We're not to excuse what Jesus says. We're not to explain away what Jesus says. We are not to try and soften what Jesus says. We are not to try and make what Jesus said and did more palatable so it is more popular and more acceptable.

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[16:45] If we are doing that, we will cause people to stumble. They will actually not know the true Christ and therefore they will not put their faith in him. We will stop them following and cause them to stumble.

for they will not be trusting and obeying the real Jesus. It will be a phantom, anemic, pale, insipid, weak, pointless, not even as fancy as Gandhi or Buddha kind of Jesus.
We take away his backbone and why bother? Any faithful do. Ironically, to do this, that is to not drain Jesus of his power will be offensive in Vancouver.
Paul said, we preach the gospel, it's a stumbling block. It's a stumbling block. But friends, not to preach Jesus as he truly is, is an even greater offence.
did he not say, if you are ashamed of me in this adulterous and sinful generation, then I will be ashamed of you when I return in my father's glory.
[18:02] Now, with this understanding we are serving a mighty Lord, he says things that really impact us. Verses three and four, basically he's saying, you are to forgive.

Now, we could spend a bit of time, trying to work out, well, in this circumstance, do I forgive? Because we could spend some time on that, couldn't we?
I mean, it seems to be if your brother sins against you. And if he repents, then you forgive him. And is it literally seven times, like is the eighth time allowed to punch him out?
Does it work like that? Rather than trying to wiggle our way around it, and I'm not trying to make it too simply, what he is saying though is, if we follow Jesus, he commands us, I want you to habitually and generously forgive, forgive, forgive.
We do not have the right to hold a grudge. He has forgiven us, we are to forgive. We do not have the right to not forgive. We are forgiven of everything.
[19:13] He is slow to anger and quick to show mercy. we are not our own. We are to obey him. We are to trust and obey him. We also prayed, did we not, forgive me my trespasses in the same manner that I forgive those who trespass against me.

It's a hard command to obey. So when we come to the second paragraph, Lord, increase our faith. What you were asking seems to be impossible.
And then we come to the interesting bit in verse 6. If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamine tree, be rooted up and planted in the sea, and it would obey you.
This is in response to them saying, Lord, we haven't got enough faith. Occasionally, it's helpful to work out what a verse isn't saying. I don't think Jesus suddenly thought, listen, next time you're in your backyard and you want to give your dad curry, if you have enough faith, you can say to his favourite banana plant, be rooted, and it'll land in his jacuzzi.
I don't think that's what Jesus, you know, this is something you can do. This is not the issue. He's basically saying, if you have faith this small, you can do the impossible.
[20:36] It's not a question of how much faith you have, it's what you have your faith in. If you have just the tiniest amount of faith, you can do the impossible, because if you put your faith in me, I will enable you.

We will basically see that there's two essential elements to not stumbling, faith, trust, believing what Jesus says, and then obeying him, doing it, walking the path.
Trusting and obeying, trust and obey. There's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. Then we come to that great story of the ten lepers, which really is an example of what it is truly to trust and obey.
I'm not sure whether you noticed that when the ten lepers call out to him, have mercy, he gives them a command. He says in verse 14, when he saw them he said to them, go and show yourselves to the priests.
And as they went they were cleansed. Do you know what he just did? He gave them a foolish command. Lord we have leprosy. Okay this is what you have to do.
[21:50] Go and show yourselves to the priests. They're the ones that declare you clean. But Lord we go and show yourselves to the priests.

And we are told when they trusted what he said and did what he commanded, even though it didn't make sense, we're told at the end of verse 14, and as they went they were healed.
As they went they were cleansed. You know often the blessing that God offers us is trust me, obey me and see what happens.

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Now the only other thing I want to point out to you is this. I have met some Christians. I serve the Lord. I've been serving him faithfully for years.
I do my duty. I work hard and it's hard. I suspect what God delights in is a cheerful giver.
[22:51] and what we have is one man returning. We read in verse 15 that after the ten are healed, only one knows what to do about it.

Verse 15, then one of them when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice, fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Brothers and sisters, let us trust and obey. and when God blesses us, let us remember to turn back to him, to give glory to God, to fall at his feet afresh, to thank him and say, Lord, I will continue to trust and obey with joy.
John was executed. John the Baptist, he didn't get out of prison, but he trusted the Lord and obeyed him and now us in glory. Let us pray.
Amen. There will be periods of silence between the spoken prayers when you may add your own intercessions in the quietness of your own hearts.
[24:29] Heavenly Father, thank you that we can gather together today to sing your praises and adore you. thank you.

Thank you, Father, for your many gifts to us, the beauty of your creation, the lovely sunshine this weekend, the blessings of family, friends, and this community of St.
John's. And, Father, we thank you most of all for Jesus who is present to us, who died and rose again, so that we might get just a glimpse of your great love for each of us.
Father, as we reflect on Richard's sermon, we pray to know you and love you more deeply. to serve you more faithfully, our Lord and Master.
Give us the strength to stand against our culture. Help us daily to trust you with our lives and our circumstances. Keep us obedient to your word and fill us with gratitude for your many blessings to us.
[26:02] Amen. Heavenly Father, we remember many who are unemployed in the city, in our country, in the U.S.

and around the world because of the global recession. Father, we pray for your provision of new jobs and financial stability for individuals and families who are suffering at this time.
We pray too for our government leaders to make wise decisions as they seek to respond to this economic crisis. heavenly father, we are thankful for those who courageously serve you here and overseas in a variety of missionary postings.
We remember Jess and Erica Cantillon and their three boys as they get ready to leave for Israel.
We pray for Jeremy Curry in Kona preparing to go to Nepal.
We remember Heather Bellamy in Afghanistan, Richard and Don Bates in Cairo, Egypt, and Joss stronghold with Arab vision media in Cairo, Egypt.
[28:05] Father, we pray that you would strengthen each one of these, protect them physically and spiritually, and give them an abiding sense of your presence.

heavenly father, we pray for our church, for the worldwide Anglican communion.
we thank you for the faithfulness of many in remote and distant lands who have prayed for us over the past seven years. We thank you for Archbishop Venables and Bishops Harvey, Harding, and Ferris, who have stepped forward to offer pastoral care and leadership in the Anglican Network in Canada.
Father, continue to care for these bishops and their families, protecting them and giving them the strength they need for their duties. Dear Lord, we lift up to you our coming court case in May.
we thank you for the work of our lawyers and pray that you may continue to guide and lead them as our court date approaches. Father, we pray for sufficient funds to cover our legal expenses and we ask that you may stand among us whatever the outcome.
[30:04] We ask, Father, that you would cover us as a congregation, provision, that you would give us a special sense of your Holy Spirit keeping us, sustaining us, and trusting in your good provision for us.

We pray especially for our clergy and staff, that they would be strengthened and protected at this time. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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And now, Father, we bring to you those of our church family who have been ill and are in need of your healing touch. We remember Jill, Jean, Paul, Rowena, Ron, Ben, and Harold.
We also pray for Larry, Heather, and Jason Polfer as they mourn the death of Larry's mother last week. We thank you for your loving kindness to each one and pray that you would come to them in all your mercy and power to heal mind and body and body to your praise and glory.
[31:48] Lastly, Father, we come to you with our own particular challenges this day, those things which are foremost in our hearts and minds as we kneel before you.

We lay these burdens at the foot of your cross. prayers. Thank you that nothing is impossible for you, our great and mighty God.
All these prayers we offer in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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