

Luke 17:1-10 PM

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[0:00] Heavenly Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening? In Christ's name, Amen. Be seated, everyone. Be seated. Be seated. Grab a seat there. Grab a seat. If you haven't met me, my name is Aaron Roberts. I'm one of the ministers on staff here.

I'd love to meet you afterwards if you are new or newish. And I really encourage you to head downstairs for a bowl of homemade soup. The soups are delicious always. We are in a short series looking at doing a pretty deep dive into a few chapters in Luke's gospel.

And for context, for a couple of weeks now, the thing that Jesus has been talking about is he's been talking about how we should be generous with our money.

Generous with our money. And this week, he's talking about how we be relationally generous. Relationally generous. I mean, it's right there in verse 4.

We're to forgive and forgive and forgive and forgive. So after all this money talk in the previous chapter, Jesus is saying, there's a scenario where a person could be outwardly financially generous.

[1:11] They're given to all the right causes, but they're relationally tight-fisted. They're holding grudges. They can get petty.

They can persevere on how they've been wronged. Careless in how they treat people. They can act in ways which are really discouraging to others. All the while, being financially generous.

So that's a bit of a teaser, a little bit of a context. Let's jump in and let's dive straight into the text.

There are three sections to this. Three sections.

First section, verses 1 to 4. The key idea here is pay attention to yourself in verse 3. Don't be careless in how you act and speak around people.

So let me remind you, it should come up behind me here. And he said to his disciples, Temptations to sin is sure to come, but woe, woe to the one with through whom may come. It would be better if, for him or her, if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea, then he should cause one of my little ones to sin.

[2:20] Pay attention to yourself. So a millstone, it's just a big giant rock that was used to grind up grain back in the days. So the picture is one of those rocks is tied around your neck and you're thrown off Barad Street Bridge.

Which is a terrible way to die. So Jesus is saying temptations are going to happen in life. Things are going to come along.

They're going to mess with your relationship with Jesus. And if you, like you, you are the cause of messing someone's relationship with Jesus up, if you are the person that trips them up spiritually, Jesus says, goodness, I take that very, very seriously.

And I know the imagery of the millstone, it's really full on. And I just think I should make clear, does Jesus want to throw people off bridges? That's not, no, that's not his thing.

Right? So if you're taking notes, that's really, you should write that down. So here's, here's, here's, here's a way to think about these very serious words. Okay. Do you know the game?

[3:31] Would you rather? Have you guys ever played this game? Would you rather? You know this game? Okay. Would you rather? So if you don't know, it's a game where you just ask each other questions and you have to choose between two really terrible things.

So for example, I looked up a few. Would you rather be in jail for five years or be in a coma for 10 years? Oh, that's tricky.

That's tricky. Would you rather find a rat in your kitchen, Jacob? Would you rather find a rat in your kitchen or a cockroach in your bed?

Oh, that's a rat. Yeah, cockroach, I think. Cockroach. Cockroach. I think they're quite clean animals. Would, would you rather have thick hair cover your face, like butt?

Just coincidence. Like, like, completely cover your face or thick hair cover the inside of your mouth?

No, that's tricky, right?

[4 : 34] Face? Yeah, I think you're going to face. I think that's kind of what's going on here. Would you rather cause somebody to sin or have a millstone tied around your neck?

Jesus is saying, tempting somebody away from God is worse than getting thrown off the bridge.

That's the worst option of the two. If you had to choose, choose the millstone.

That's what he's saying. And I know the imagery is very, very violent, but sort of get behind that a little bit because Jesus is trying to communicate how much your relationship with him matters.

Like, this is how much God loves you. This is how dear your relationship with him is. This is how much God treasures you. This is how much God hates the idea of you being drawn away from him.

So pay attention to yourselves. Watch yourselves. You know, we could be tempting people away from God without even realizing it. The obvious question is, how could we do that?

[5 : 42] You know, how could we be a stumbling block for others, especially new believers? In the passage, when it talks about my little ones, it's talking about new believers. How could we throw people off balance?

Well, lots of ways. There's some really obvious ones. It's like, Jacob, let's go steal a car and crash it. I mean, there's obvious stupid stuff, which we're probably not going to do. But could we do it around here?

You know, like, St. John loves Bible studies, right? I mean, you run one after that. I mean, it's not a Bible study, but it's like a catechism class. But how could we throw each other off in a situation like that?

Well, we could be a stumbling block in a Bible study or in a catechism class if we were a know-it-all. If he's like, yes, I know the answer to this. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

I think the church fathers are quite clear on this. Blah, blah, blah. I mean, you could make a new believer feel really dumb. Like, they don't belong. They don't come back.

[6 : 44] Or we could be complainers. You know, always complaining about how things are done around here. And a new believer hears this and starts to think, actually, you're right. This place is kind of lame. I'm out of here. Or we could just be a bad example in our relationships, parties, social situations.

You know? I remember being a young Christian and seeing some mature Christians behaving badly and thinking, oh, man, I just thought we were supposed to be different. It was really discouraging.

Tempting people away from God is a great sin, especially tempting people away who are new to the faith. So pay attention to yourselves. Pay attention to how you're acting. So, we're still in point one. Still in point one. Another way we can make somebody stumble is in the area of forgiveness. And this is how, verses one to two, link with verses three and four. If your brother or sister sins, rebuke him.

Rebuke her. And if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day and turns to you seven times saying, I repent, you must forgive him. Now, this is not everything the Bible has to say about forgiveness.

[7 : 55] There's so much more to say. And the issue is, I think, you hear that and you get easily sidetracked because your brain will start thinking up all these scenarios, all these different scenarios. You know, like, it's like, it's like, you know, 10.30 and Jacob's already annoyed me like seven times this morning.

Like, what am I going to do about this? And you can start to think, well, maybe he's, you know, maybe he's not very genuine in his repentance. Like, I understand all these scenarios will go through your head.

But let's focus on the big point that Jesus is trying to make in very few words. Jesus is using hyperbole to make a very simple point, which is, we are to be a people, marked by forgiveness and reconciliation.

A Christian disciple is to forgive and forgive and forgive and forgive and forgive and forgive and forgive. You probably guessed that the number seven is a symbolic number.

In the Bible, it's a number that represents completeness. So we don't stop forgiving at eight. Seven means completeness.

[8 : 59] If someone's sinning against you seven times, it's like they're sinning against you in a terribly, like in a completely terrible way. It's not, you know, I mean, it would be easy if it was like somebody annoys you, insults you seven times in one day.

You kind of go, okay, I'll get to number eight and then it's just, you know, we'll be good after that. I'll just hate them after that. No, it's like, it's worse than that. It's far worse than that. He's saying, if you are horribly, horribly wronged, we're called to forgive.

Now, that can take lots of time. Forgiveness can be a great journey and you might need counseling and you might need a lot of wisdom from good people around you, but we are called to forgive.

Now, how does this relate to the temptation piece at verse one and two?

Remember, the first part of our passage is, you know, don't tempt other people. Don't tempt other people. Don't be a jerk. Don't tempt people away from God and then all of a sudden it's talking about forgiving because not forgiving can actually be a temptation.

It can be, if you don't forgive somebody, you can actually be putting a stumbling block in front of them because it's a bad example. You're holding on to a grudge and to not forgive, let's say, the person who, the perpetrator, I don't know what else to call them, who was repentant, if you don't forgive them, that's a really awful place for them to be in, in this place of great discouragement.

[10 : 25] So discouraging they can be tempted to walk away from Jesus. I mean, I've seen, like I've seen this and I know all these scenarios are playing out in your head. What about this?

What about this extreme situation? I know, but you also know that one of the things could be playing out in your head right now is you're thinking, I just, it just makes us sound like doormats, like people are just going to keep bowling us over, like just insulting us, being awful to us.

No. Do you notice one of the first things it says is, well it says, it's not saying just sit passively and let people just, you know, be awful to you all the time.

We're actually supposed to speak up. It says right there, if your brother or sister sins, rebuke them. You don't just let this stuff happen to you. Verse 3 says we're to confront them. You've done me wrong, it was wrong that you did that.

Let's talk about this. I want to forgive you. That's what we do. We do the hard work of reconciling. We have the awkward conversations. That's what we do. We don't ghost people, we don't ignore them, we don't block them. We have the hard conversations.

[11 : 33] And again, going back to verse 1, this is another way we actually can be a stumbling block for people. Because when we don't confront them, when we leave them just with this kind of habitual way of relating to people which is really unhealthy, we become complicit in that.

We let them do it. We never say anything. We're enabling this sort of dysfunction. We're enabling this sin. It's unloving. It's facilitating it. It's another way we actually tempt people. Again, the Bible has a million more things to say about forgiveness here.

In this passage though, it seems Jesus is particularly concerned on what's happening in us. And this is the last thing I'll say about this. What's happening in here for us?

Remember verse 3 says, pay attention to yourselves. That's in verse 3. That is referring back to tempting others and it's forward in terms of how we respond to hurt.

Let me explain that so it's really clear. When we hurt, what's our instinct? Our instinct is to think about the person that has done bad things to us.

[12 : 53] And we start thinking, I cannot wait for them to get their comeuppance. You start thinking through ways that they might harm and might come to them and it kind of makes you fizzle a little bit.

Oh, that'd be good. For men, I know. Men sometimes we fantasise about violence. And Jesus says, pay attention to yourself because that is doing something to you.

That does things to your heart. A lack of forgiveness can cause all sorts of problems in a community. It can cause all sorts of problems in your own heart. I heard someone this week talk about, just because of the work I kind of do, I like the etymology of words, where words came from, what words mean.

I love this stuff. I heard somebody talking this week about the etymology of the word wrath. Am I saying that right? Wrath? Wrath. Wrath. Wrath, is that he saying? Wrath.

Which is what you might feel if somebody wrongs you. Wrath. Wrath. Another word. Wreath. Wrath. Another word.

[14:04] Writhe. One more word. Wraith. All of these words have the same root. Isn't that interesting, Jacob Vandiver? Wrath means anger, but it's a special type of anger.

These are English words. These are different Bible words for wrath. Just ignore those for a moment. Wrath. English, I think it's Germanic is the root.

It's a special type of anger, vengeful anger directed at somebody. You want them to pay and you want to be the person dishing it out. You can be angry at somebody and that can be, I think that can be a justified anger, but this is a special type of anger.

Wreath is the thing you hang on your door at Christmas time. You get the branches and you twist all the branches around in a circle. You understand what that thing is to make a decoration?

Writhe means what? To twist, to contort. You see the same root for those last two there? Breathe and writhe, twist, contort.

[15:09] Back to wrath, the root idea reminds us of what wrath does to us. It contorts us. It twists us on the inside. Now, writhe, do you know what a writhe is?

It's a ghost. It's a fictional type of ghost. A ghost. A ghost that is twisted with rage. It's an angry ghost. A ghost that has been wronged in its living life and it's doomed to relive what was done to it over and over again forever.

And they'll stay in that place and they'll haunt that place and their whole future, their eternity is just controlled by their past, by this wrong that was done to them. All the same root.

When we don't forgive, we may lead to wrath against that person. What does that do to you? It twists you. It twists you on the inside. You become contorted on the inside and you can end up living like a wraith.

Locked in to a future dictated by your past. And of course, you know, talk to a counsellor about this, but it just leads to like less joy and less trusting of people.

[16:22] Jesus says, don't let that happen to you. Don't let the lack of forgiveness do that to you. Watch yourself. Pay attention to yourself. One more thing very, very quickly here.

Sometimes the wrong done to you is so egregious that you need a lot of extra help. You need the Holy Spirit. You need people praying for you and you maybe need to see a counsellor.

And if you need any of those things, come and talk to me. I have some recommendations. Okay, that's the first section. That's point one. Now the second section, very, very quick. Verse five.

The apostles said to the Lord, increase our faith. So the apostles are hearing this and they speak up and they implicitly say, this is just too hard to forgive and to forgive and to forgive and to forgive. It's just too hard. We can't do that. We need more faith, which is interesting, isn't it? They don't say we need more patience, we need more obedience, we need more grace. They say we need more faith.

[17:22] Why? Because it takes faith to forgive. What do I mean by that? It takes faith to forgive. Faith says, here's some examples. Faith says, I can trust God with all of the uncertainties in my life right now because I know He sees everything, that He is omnipotent, omnipotent, etc.

Faith says, I can say no to temptations because I know God is not trying to rip me off, that He knows what's best for me. Faith says, look at what Jesus did to forgive me.

Look at everything He went through to forgive me. Speaking of forgive, forgive, forgive, forgive, forgive, forgive, Judas' kiss of betrayal, the Pharisees just plotting to kill Him, the mockery, the whipping, His complete abandonment by all His best mates, the nails in the hands.

We read with faith that Jesus experienced all that, all that treachery, all that pain, and He still said at the end there, Father, forgive them. See, faith keeps bringing us back to the cross.

That's where we find our own forgiveness and the power to forgive. And in this passage, Jesus then gives us a little picture of the kind of faith He's looking for.

[18:38] In verse 6 it says, if you had faith like a grain of a mustard seed, you could say that this mulberry tree be uprooted and planted in the sea and it would obey you. So mustard seed is a tiny, tiny, tiny seed.

Mulberry tree is a massive tree like an oak tree. And the mini story here, it's not saying, you know, it's not saying God will give you telekinesis. It's not saying faith gives you magic powers or anything like that.

And I think this is kind of what I used to think. You know, it was like, if I haven't, you know, faith, I can do crazy miracles or something if I just have some faith. It's not really what it's about. It's just don't overthink it. It's a picture of a ludicrously small thing that moves a ludicrously big thing. Okay? Don't overthink it. That's just all it's saying.

Now you translate the faith and forgiveness saying even a tiny amount of trust will enable you to do what you think is actually impossible. And that is to forgive people that have harmed you.

[19 : 41] Even great harms. Because faith, it's never about how big your faith is. It's always about what your faith is in. And our faith is in a man who knew what it was to forgive the most egregious of things.

Okay. Third section. So point one, first section, pay attention to yourself. Don't trip people up. And remember, one way we can trip people up is through a lack of forgiveness and also a lack of confronting people.

Point two, forgiveness. That's really hard. God, give us more faith. Now, point three, Jesus tells this really interesting story which is like the millstone thing.

that kind of throws us off a little bit. But let me remind you of it. Will any 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 the table? Rhetorical question answers no.

Will he not rather say to him, prepare supper for me and dress properly and serve me while I eat and drink and afterwards you will eat and drink? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded?

[20 : 53] Say also, when you have done all that you were commanded say, we are unworthy servants, we have only done what was our duty. Okay, it's a bit tricky, particularly for Canadians this because the master seems so, he's not very polite, is he?

There's a massive cultural gap here, okay, so let me just try and make that a little bit smaller. Firstly, first thing to say, servants, slaves here, they're not like, mostly, they're not like the slaves that we think about when we think about sort of 19th century slave trade, okay, but they're not employees either, don't get me wrong, it's not pretty, like they're not employees.

So, back in the days what would happen, if you got into debt, option one, common option, straight to jail, you're not fed, you're just rotten jail, straight to jail, begin into debt.

Or, option two, if there was some grace on the part of the creditor, the person you owed, you could work off the debt. So, you would become their servant.

Usually, it lasted a year or two. There's biblical sort of parameters, it couldn't last more than seven years, it wasn't a lifetime. Basically, it was an agreement that you were never off duty until the debt was paid.

[22 : 10] So, Jesus told this story, I hope that was helpful, Jesus tells the story, servant does the field work, then makes dinner for the master. It's his duty. The master isn't going, oh, you've done me such a huge favour here, thank you so much, you know, put your feet up, take a break.

No, it's just the servant's doing his duty. You think, it's so impolite, this has got nothing to do with politeness. This is not a story about politeness. Forget about politeness for a moment.

It's just a servant doing his duty. I mean, be polite, obviously, be polite. The master doesn't thank the servant, because the servant should be thanking the master for keeping him out of jail and giving this person away out of their debt and their shame.

So, it's simply the duty to serve the master. The master never owes the servant anything. So, hold that idea in your brain. Okay, how does this relate to what we've been talking about?

Let's say, let's say this. Let's say, you've been doing the things that Jesus says. you're financially generous, you're relationally generous, very forgiving, live well.

[23 : 21] You can never think to yourself, I'm doing great, God owes me. Never let that thought come into your head. We operate the way we operate.

We do the things we do. We live well, we live Christianly because it's our duty before God. And this story is simply a warning against pride right at the end here. It's a warning against spiritual pride.

We can never be in debt to God. So, let me try and summarize all of this. You ready? This is going to be very quick. Pay attention to how you live.

Watch yourself. How you navigate this world. You don't want to trip people up spiritually. Jesus takes that very, very seriously. You can do that in lots of ways, including being cowardly in your relationships, not willing to confront.

By doing that, you're facilitating somebody doing things which is displeasing God. It's enabling. You could also do that by holding on to your hurt and your anger and not forgiving and being twisted by it.

[24 : 32] and that other person obviously being super discouraged if they're repentant. All this is obviously very, very difficult because some of those wounds are deep.

Very deep. As a community, we need to be committed to honesty and reconciliation and we need faith to do this.

We must always have the gospel for us. Story of God who went to extraordinary lengths to save us and forgive us.

So, finally, watch yourself because we don't want to get too big for our boots either thinking, man, I am just killing it right now.

You know? We must remember our place. We will never be so spiritual that God is in our debt. We serve because we are Christ's servants.

[25 : 37] We're not the master. God owes us nothing. But wonderfully, miraculously, amazingly, he saved us anyway and called us into friendship with him. Amen.