

Luke 17:1-10 "Extraordinary Ordinary Christianity"

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Such a fun song. Thank you all. It's a lot to rejoice in this morning. Thank you to the one of you who texted me during the song to say you wanted to dance, but I needed to start it.

I felt that, but you want me to dance in my heart, and that's where you want it to stop. We'll keep it there.

Part of the beauty in that song is that it tells our story, doesn't it? It's a story that Scotty Smith talked about last week in terms of desperation and delight.

Did you hear that in there? I know you heard the delight, but in the words, the desperation of where we found ourselves, that's at the heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, isn't it? To be so desperately dependent on Him and delighted in what He has done for us.

[1 : 04] It's at the heart of what it means to be a community of people who gather together to celebrate Jesus. That's what we're doing this morning. We delight in welcoming people into a church family.

Even as they do so, they begin by acknowledging their desperation, right? They're sinners without hope, except in God's mercy rescuing them.

So on this day where we consider young people and older people trusting Jesus, promising to follow Jesus as a part of this church, it's appropriate that in our study of Luke, we come to a passage where Jesus is telling us what it looks like to be a part of His community, to follow Him. I want you to notice this morning as Jesus tells us what His community looks like, the honesty of it. The reality that sin and struggle will still be present in this community is not a surprise to Jesus. In fact, it's where Jesus begins when He's talking about it. He's going to tell us some really important things that are, on the one hand, very basic to following Jesus.

[2 : 19] Normal, everyday stuff. And on the other hand, those same things are also so difficult that it's not an exaggeration to call them supernatural.

Let's listen to Jesus tell about this extraordinary, ordinary Christian community. And we'll talk about it for a few minutes after we read. Picking up Jesus' conversation at Luke 17, verse 1.

He's talking now to His disciples. This is God's holy, inerrant, infallible Word that He gives to us so that we can know how to have relationship with Him and that that relationship would transform all our other relationships.

Wow. Let's listen. He said to His disciples, Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through 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. Pay attention to yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him.

[3 : 28] And if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in the day and turns to you seven times saying, I repent, you must forgive him. The apostles said to the Lord, Increase our faith.

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.

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 sit down at table? 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?

Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? 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.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for this, Your word. In some ways, they are hard words for us.

[4 : 38] And we ask Your help. We acknowledge again our need for You, every one of us. Come by Your Spirit and teach us, but also mold us and shape us, even in ways that are painful, that help us.

We might know You, love You, and live as You've called us to. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Before we jump in this morning to what Jesus tells us about being a part of His community, a couple of words to those of you who don't follow Jesus, or who maybe aren't sure that you would really want to.

As we go into this, as we talk through this passage, I'm going to point out things that Christians must take seriously. And you may well think to yourself when I say some of them, well, that's not what I've seen or experienced from the Christians I know.

Sounds like a lot of talk to me. That's fair enough. You can probably help us see some blind spots that we have in these areas where we don't actually live like the type of community that God has called us to.

And I'd welcome that input. I'd love to hear where you see that from me, from us. We need to know. But I'd also encourage you as you listen this morning to consider not just other Christians you've seen, but Jesus Himself.

[6 : 05] What He both calls for and what He creates in a community. Because that's the kind of community that He is making us into even if we're not there yet.

So it's the kind of church, the kind of family that you too could be a part of. And notice how essential Jesus is to sustaining relationships like this.

Notice Jesus as we talk this morning. First thing in this passage that we see biblical Christianity takes sin seriously.

And you may be saying, well, yeah, that's what Christians are known for, right? They got that one down. They're pointing out everybody else's sin. That's all I ever hear from them. That's not what I'm talking about.

It's not what this means. It's quite the opposite, in fact. When I say we take sin seriously, I mean first and foremost our own sin within the community of believers in Jesus.

[7 : 08] Jesus begins by saying temptations to sin are sure to come. It's certain.

I love how Jesus recognizes that we will struggle. It's a repeated theme in the Gospel of Luke when Jesus talks about His followers and that community. Commentator Dane Ortland says it this way, the fundamental distinction between churches is not that some of them have sinners and others do not.

The fundamental distinction is that some churches have honest sinners and other churches have self-protecting sinners. The question is not whether we are sinful or not, but whether or not we are honest about it.

But, even though those things are certain, what's Jesus saying here?

Woe to the one through 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.

[8 : 19] We hear it a little more clearly now at the end of what Jesus is saying. That's a pretty clear warning, isn't it? We understand what that means, but what's got Jesus so worked up?

What's He warning against? Jesus is strongly condemning, leading someone else towards sin and away from Him. Like, how, Will?

How would someone do that that Jesus would be condemning? Well, I think it's hard for us to understand because when I read the phrase temptations to sin, I picture in my mind like a drug dealer or something who's kind of tempting little kids over here to get involved with bad stuff, to make a bad decision and a bad choice.

And that's not wrong, but it's not really the picture here. The word that's translated temptations to sin has in mind more than a single bad choice or action, but rather a heart being bent towards sin away from Jesus, a direction that is away from Jesus, a stumbling block that leads someone towards sin which is always away from Jesus.

The little ones could be kids, but really it's anyone who's young in faith, who's little in the community, an outsider to spiritual things.

[9 : 50] don't dare lead them or keep them away from Jesus. That's what he's saying. So the warning is for those in the Christian community, perhaps especially for leaders, teachers, don't

teach someone by your words that self-righteousness and good behavior is the way to Jesus.

That actually leads away from him as Jesus so often told the Pharisees. don't lead someone away from Jesus on the other hand by your flagrant and unrepentant sin that says there's another story that's truer than what I preach.

Don't through hypocrisy or pride or favoritism keep someone away from Jesus whom you've been charged to lead to Jesus. It will not go well with you, Jesus says, if you find yourself doing those things.

Taking sin seriously certainly means not trifling with what God's word tells us is dangerous. But it doesn't mean merely avoiding sin which you're never going to do perfectly.

Does your defensiveness or your lack of repentance say to your kids that the only safe place is in successful, obedient living?

[11 : 14] On the other end of the spectrum, does your sacrificial following of Jesus communicate to those around you that He really is worth giving up everything for?

Or do those who are newer, younger, potential Christians in your life, do they watch you and get the impression that as much as you say Jesus is worth everything, really, the true path to pleasure is indulging self and what you need.

That's where life is really found. You just have to say this other thing about Jesus. I can tell by watching you He's not worth it. See, the opposite of temptations to sin, stumbling blocks to lead them away from Jesus is helping them to stand firm in the Lord, to trust His strength, to find their hope only in Him.

So if it's woe to those who lead away from Jesus, then blessed are those who anchor others in Jesus, be they kids in your home or friends that you have.

That's what taking sin seriously does for little ones in our community. It anchors them to Jesus. Then, verse 3, pay attention to yourselves.

[12 : 35] In other words, watch out for each other. Look out for each other. Not just yourself. If your brother sins, rebuke him.

How seriously must we take sin? So seriously that whenever we see a brother or sister in sin, we must rebuke them. Jesus clearly commands us to confront sin in each other.

I'll be honest. There is very little in all of God's Word that my heart runs away from faster than those couple of words right there. I don't enjoy this. There's all sorts of things in me that come up with reasons to avoid it.

There's my desire to be loved. My aversion to conflict. My idol of peace and comfort that would like just a nice, easy conversation, nothing really hard.

lots of reasons not to confront people. In fact, it's easier for me to stand up here and hide behind this pulpit and rebuke your sins than it is to sit across the lunch table one-on-one and have that conversation.

[13 : 50] And some of us hide behind social media, hide behind busy schedules, or any number of other things when Jesus says quite simply, we must address sin personally and consistently.

And we're failing to love a brother or sister just as grievously as if we didn't tell our toddler to take his finger out of the electrical outlet when we saw him.

And we knew there was danger there and we didn't say anything. That's how, you know how unloving that would be for a parent? It would be equally or more unloving for us. Do we really believe sin is what drags us away from Jesus?

Is it really that serious, that dangerous to us? Of course, there are other places where we're told to do this gently, graciously, and humbly because we sin too, so don't get too excited about running off to tell people off.

But here, we're simply told to do it. The reason we can, what actually enables us to rebuke sin in a brother or sister is the rest of the sentence.

[15 : 05] We can do this because if he repents, forgive him. As seriously as we take sin, we must also take forgiveness seriously, perhaps even more so.

See, if you think about it for a second, if I take forgiveness seriously, then work backwards a little bit. then I'm actually able, it's a bit easier, to rebuke sin graciously because I've got a salve for the wound I may be creating.

If sin is a problem in the community, forgiveness is the solution to it. Imagine, if you will, a friend in your small group who's been complaining to you about her husband and she's been talking

glowingly about this guy at work who's so wonderful and it feels easier for you to avoid having the conversation that Jesus tells you you must have.

But if you remember first your own sin, if you are eager to forgive, then it actually makes the conversation a more hopeful one to enter into.

You're not coming to scold or condemn, right? Rather, you're coming to bring hope and restoration. Sin may be different for you.

[16:29] It may be pride or anger, racism, selfishness, alcohol abuse, whatever that sin is that you need to confront.

But regardless, forgiveness must be the immediate response to repentance. If he repents, forgive him.

For some of us, that's harder than confrontation. It doesn't seem just or fair, right? It doesn't seem to account for all the pain I've endured.

And sometimes it just doesn't work to change things. That doesn't get us anywhere. Where? Jesus says, forgive him. Is there someone you need to forgive this morning?

Better take the chance right now. Write the name down. It's only getting harder. Verse 4. And if he sins against you seven times in the day and turns to you seven times saying, I repent, you must forgive him.

[17:42] Forgive not just immediately but repeatedly. Forgiveness must be the persistent response to repentance. Now listen, I know where some of you are going right now.

I know there's two sides to this. There are two people involved and you've got a theology of repentance that you want to pull out right now and say, this is what gospel repentance looks like and it has fruit and can I just encourage you with something?

That's true. It's not what Jesus is talking about right here. Right now you are the forgiver. You're not worried about the repenter. You're the forgiver that Jesus is talking to.

And he's saying to you seven times in one day someone repents. You forgive. For reference, three times was considered magnanimous by the religious leaders of Jesus' day.

They thought that was very gracious and forgiving. Jesus says seven implying full, free, persistent forgiveness even against repeat offenders.

[18:47] Oh, they frustrate us, don't they? The same thing you just did. Let me ask you to think about something. How many times a day do you think God forgives you?

I want an actual number to go in your head. It's okay if it's not exactly right but just kind of an estimate. You know, back to math class. How many times a day do you think God forgives you? Did you remember to include the thoughts and attitudes of your heart, not just the actions and bad decisions that you include?

Don't leave those out. Did you remember to count the sins of omission, the duties that you neglected to do? You could have done, should have done, but just didn't?

Number getting a little bit bigger. I don't know how many zeros yours has, but just pick a round number. And as we start to contemplate that for just a minute, it's where the beauty of Jesus' community actually comes into this.

Because, listen, I totally relate to the difficulty that we feel in following some of these things Jesus said. I mean, just imagine those situations. He disrespected you again.

[19:57] She hurt your kids' feelings again. They let you down, left you out again. And nothing about you wants to forgive, does it?

You don't feel that way. You don't have any forgiveness to give, do you? Have you been there? Are you there today, maybe? I don't have any forgiveness to give there.

It doesn't make sense. See, forgiveness is costly, isn't it? There is a debt that must be paid. And forgiveness is painful. There is a wound that needs to be mended.

And so it hurts and it costs to think about this. And if you have been hurt enough, and some of you have been, if they owe you enough, and some people owe you, moralism will never compel you to forgive.

A preacher yelling loudly at you will not compel you to forgive if you hurt enough. You need Jesus. He's absolutely essential.

[21:03] There's no other way it works. You actually have to stare at your own debt before the face of God to have that number start piling up, to consider who is it that we've sinned against.

You have to cry out to Him to feel again the tidal wave of His grace rushing over you in Jesus Christ.

To feel His forgiveness that has to wash you clean every day. And then, then you have the resources to forgive someone else.

Then you have rivers of grace flowing out from you because the ocean, the tidal wave of God's grace has poured over you.

God's grace will have you ever wondered why God left His people as sinners in the world? God, why is sin just still a part of life when You've forgiven us for all those sins and You know God better than we do how sin divides and devastates and destroys?

[22 : 10] Why did You leave us still sinners? You ever thought about that before? I think it must be at least partially that it is even more important to God than eliminating sin is and that's really important.

That we delight in Jesus. That we remain aware of our desperate need of Him. That we learn to live in relationship with Him where He is glorious to us.

That's important to God. Really important. Important enough to leave us battling against sin. Did you know, by the way, that's why we talk about sin so much?

Some of you probably think, what a crazy church, they talk about sin all the time. In fact, you could get the impression in a service like this one that we're almost proud of our sin. May it never be.

May that never be true, that we would be proud of our sin. We talk about sin a lot because it is so important that we remember how much we need our Savior.

[23 : 17] Because we must never forget how great a Savior Jesus is and how much we need Him. That's the reason we try to be honest about our sin. Part of it is just honesty, but part of it is how important it is for our hearts to cling to Jesus and the temptation to forget that we need Him if we minimize our sin.

If it's important to take sin seriously and more important to take forgiveness seriously, it's most important to take Jesus seriously. When we see our sin, we see the requirement of forgiveness, we need a great Savior.

Not just a decent teacher, not just a guy who's a good life coach, we need a great Savior who alone can rescue us and provide the resources for us to be the community that He commands us to be. we don't just need the path, we need the power to live like this and only Jesus gives it. He's the only one. Jesus, the object of our faith, gives supernatural power for things naturally beyond us.

It's the point of the next couple of verses. Verse 5, the apostles say to Jesus, increase our faith. 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.

[24 : 49] Do you relate with the disciples? They take to heart what Jesus is saying about forgiveness, don't they? Jesus, increase our faith. How could we ever do that? Help!

We can't do it. We need more faith. And Jesus says, well, not exactly. it's the object of the faith that's the source of power.

So that even the smallest amount of faith can uproot even the strongest tree in their world and heave it into the ocean. We all know days where our faith feels small, don't we?

Jesus says on those days, you get the same strong Savior, the same tidal wave of forgiveness, the same supernatural Holy Spirit empowerment for life and living in a sin stained world that you would get on the days you think you're strong.

It's not that people need to be more like us, great in faith. It's that they, like us, need a great Savior. If someone comes to you, someone may have said to you before, I just need your faith.

[26 : 08] say, no, you need my Jesus. He sustains me. He holds on to me. He empowers me in my weakest hour.

Then Jesus concludes with a parable to remind us that He has done so much for us that no matter how much we serve Him, He will never be in our debt.

Verse 7, will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he's come in from the field, come at once and recline at table? No. 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?

Yes, that is what they would say. Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? No. 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.

The point here in saying unworthy servants here at the end, it's not that we're insignificant, worthless, that's not what the word means, it's not that we should treat others as though they are worthless, rather it means that we never merit a change in places with God.

[27 : 29] We don't become creditor master and him debtor. We don't become master and him servant. The servant works hard all day but still fixes dinner rather than earning the right to be fed by the master.

That's how great the gift of Jesus is to us, that we remain dependent on him, that we never stop needing him, we never become the source of his forgiveness.

It's the other way around, right? This is the spirit of humility many see as the thread of the whole passage. Seeing sin, extending gracious forgiveness, grasping for more of Jesus by faith, serving his kingdom rather than my own.

Humility is essential in Jesus' community because while we are significant in his story, the story is not ultimately about us. We're not the heroes.

While we are meaningful servants in the kingdom, we are not the king. Imagine you come up to me after the service and say, what a great sermon, pastor.

[28 : 37] I know, I said, imagine, imagine that you did. And if I responded by saying, well, yes, I am quite fantastic. In fact, I hope you'll tell many others about me and this morning is after all, all about me, so thank you for noticing.

I hope you would slap me. Jesus says you have to rebuke me, so there. hopefully, what I would not just say but actually feel is what a joy it is to do something God has called me to do.

What a privilege it is to share such good news about Jesus that I need so desperately myself. And I hope you'll tell others about Jesus too. Similarly, when you gently rebuke a brother or sister, when you forgive the seventh time even though it hurts, when you trust Jesus in a hard situation where you would more likely grasp for control, you have merely done ordinary Christianity.

But it required an extraordinary Jesus. You may say what a joy to reflect the heart of Jesus to me by forgiving someone else.

And that pointing someone else to Jesus, that confronting a fellow sinner, that forgiving a repeat offender was supernatural. Basic Christianity, yes, Jesus says, but absolutely supernatural, only possible through the grace of Jesus.

[30 : 15] It's why those of us who have taken vows of membership here promise to live as followers of Jesus only in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Are you clinging desperately to Him today? Is that the posture in which you live? Are you drawing strength from His Spirit? We've said it's the only way we can live. I don't have those resources to live like that in myself, but I have a great Savior and He gives them an abundance far beyond what I deserve to enable me to live for Him.

See, this table says exactly that to us. It says, first of all, that sin is serious. So serious Jesus had to die for it. It says forgiveness is serious.

So serious we should celebrate it often because we need it. And it says Jesus is most serious. We cling to Him as our great Savior.

The only way that we can live with God. The only food we need to empower us and strengthen us for living as He has called us to.

[31 : 29] He owes us nothing, does He? He's the Master. But you may remember in Luke chapter 12 a few weeks ago, when He comes back as the Master returning to unworthy servants who have done only their duty and often done very poorly at that.

Remember what He does, Luke 12? He serves us. Verse 37, blessed are those servants whom the Master finds awake when He comes. Truly I say to you, He will dress Himself for service and have them recline at table and He will come and serve them.

He's just established this morning there's no reason for that to happen. There's nothing that we deserve for Him to come to us and yet that's how He loves us.

That's what He does this morning in setting this table before us and every day throughout eternity He sets it, He invites you to dine with Him and He serves you beyond what you could ever repay. Right after He took off His outer garment and washed His disciples feet, serving them, He served them the Passover meal 1 Corinthians reminds us that He took bread and He broke it and He gave it to them saying this is my body broken for you, do this in remembrance of me.

[32 : 54] In the same way after supper He took the cup and said this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins, drink from it, all of you.

Young people, some of you are coming to partake of this table for the first time this morning and we're so excited to celebrate Jesus in this way with you. Hopefully it's the first time of many, many times in your life that you will come to the Lord's table, that Jesus will invite you to sit down with Him and here's what I want you to hear when you come.

I want you every time to hear Jesus whispering in your ear, I love you so much. I died for you so you could live with me. Every time you come, it's a chance to remember that sin is serious and confess sin.

It's a chance to remember forgiveness is serious and think is there someone I need to forgive and need to be made right with before I come and most importantly kids, when you come it's a chance to remember at this table Jesus and remember how much He loves you, that He would hang on a cross so that you wouldn't have to, so that He would be there in your place so that you could live with Him forever.

That's how much He loves you. Let's pray and then we'll come and celebrate this together. Jesus, we're so grateful for what You have done for us. And You didn't just do it once upon a time, but You come to meet with us and feed us now, so use these elements, not only to remind us of what You have done, but to strengthen us afresh for loving and serving.

[34 : 38] We ask it in Your name. Amen. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.