

Luke Chapter 17 v 1 - 10

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Date: 19 April 2020

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[0 : 00] Continuing today in our studies in Luke's Gospel, and if you cast your mind back about a month ago, perhaps you remember, perhaps you won't, but we were looking at the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

And so it said that the Pharisees, though they claimed to be servants of God, really they were serving riches, they were serving money. And Jesus tells this parable of this rich man who has all this wealth, all this food, all this enjoyment in life.

And this poor man, Lazarus, and he's a beggar, he's covered in sores, and he sits at the gates and he longs for the crumbs which fall off this man's table. But when these two die, it's a different story.

Lazarus, who's had such a tough life, he has eternal comfort, eternal joy, and he's by Abraham's side, the hero of the Jewish faith.

And the rich man watches this from afar, from Hades, and he's in torment for eternity. And it's a sobering story. Now we see this a lot in Jesus' life.

[1 : 11] He's completely surrounded by all different types of people. He's surrounded by religious people. He's surrounded by the common people. And he's surrounded by his followers, by his disciples.

And often you'll see this. He'll speak to one group of people, and then he'll turn and he'll speak to another group. And I think that's what we see here. He's just been speaking to the Pharisees, and he turns to his disciples.

And if what we've just heard is about the eternal consequences of sin, then he's going to speak to his disciples of what that means for this life now. If the consequences of serving another master, of living a sinful life, are so dire for eternity, then how should we live in the now?

How do our actions in this life affect one another? Well, in verse 3 of chapter 17, it says these words, Watch yourselves. And so he's going to say, watch yourselves, lest you fall into these patterns of sin.

But it's not just watch yourselves because your sin is destructive to yourself. But actually, it's watch yourselves lest you cause others to sin, lest you cause your brother and your sister to sin.

[2 : 28] And so he's talking about sins in the sphere of human relationships, how our sins actually affect one another. And often I think we think of ourselves as individuals, like we're in these isolated bubbles, and the things we do have no consequence on one another.

And actually often I've heard this from non-believers. They'll say something like this, Why should I listen to the Bible or your God or what you say?

Why should I listen to anyone else? What does what I do with my life matter? If it's not harming anyone else, if it's not affecting anyone else, then why does it matter what I do with my own life?

I can do what I want, can't I? But actually, the Bible is clear that the things we do, they not only are destructive to ourselves, but all sin has consequences on those around us, on those we're in relationship with.

We're not isolated, we're all in relationship with other people. And perhaps a clear example of this is we know that those who have an influence on us when we're children, especially where, you know, our parents, maybe our relatives, maybe our best friend growing up, they have a profound effect on how we turn out as people.

[3 : 51] And it's not to say that our faults and our sins, we can blame those on someone else. You know, God holds us accountable for our own actions.

But it's true, isn't it, that in one sense we are a product of the relationships around us, especially those who really have an effect on us. Well, Jesus today, when he speaks to his disciples and he speaks really about these relational sins and how the things that we do really do have an effect on how other people live.

So he says these words, starting in verse 1. Jesus said to his disciples, And so what's he saying?

Well, certainly he's talking about little children, you know, those who are young in age. And we've already spoken about how at a young age we're susceptible.

We emulate those who are older than us. And, you know, we copy our parents. We copy those around us. And so the things we do has a profound effect on children.

[5 : 28] But actually, Jesus also uses children in another sense. And I'm going to give you two examples here of where he calls adults children. So children can be those who are, you know, maybe young in the faith, or those who are poor, or those who are uneducated.

So in Mark chapter 10, verse 24, Jesus calls his disciples children when they're confused by his teaching. Or in Luke 10, verse 21, He praises God that these teachings, these things are hidden from the wise, but they're revealed to little children.

I don't think he's just talking about those young in age. He's talking about the poor, the outcasts, the uneducated. And God, he chooses the lowly things of this world, and he reveals his truth.

Not to those who are rich and those who are powerful in this life, but time and time again, he chooses those who are lowly, those who perhaps you'd look at and you wouldn't think much of.

But God chooses those people. And so we're all children of God, aren't we? And we all have people who are younger than us in the faith.

[6 : 40] We all have people who perhaps look up to us. And how do the things that we do, the things we allow ourselves to do, do we consider how they affect those around us?

What are some of the ways that we can cause other believers to stumble? How can we put a stumbling block before others? This word stumble, it's a Greek word, skandalon.

And the actual meaning is a bent stick at the end of a trap. And so you can imagine that an animal will stand on this stick, and the trap will snap closed.

And that's what this means. So the things we do, do they cause others to be caught in a snare, to be caught in a trap? Do they cause them to sin?

What are some of the things which we do, which can cause others to sin? Well, perhaps it's our humour. What are the things which we allow ourselves to laugh at?

[7 : 44] Sin has eternal consequences. Sin is serious. Sin is not something to be laughed at. Do we laugh at certain things, you know, talk about things in a jokey way, which actually are serious?

The Apostle Paul, he says that there are certain things which should not even be mentioned on our lips. Or perhaps it's the way we talk about things we've done in the past.

Maybe things we've done before we're believers. Maybe it's even when we're telling our testimonies. We can glorify sin sometimes. We can talk about sin in a positive light.

But again, sin is serious. It's not something to ever be talked about positively. Perhaps it's not even a sinful thing, a sinful habit in ourselves.

Perhaps it's something which is good and right in itself. But it can be a problem for people who struggle with it. So alcohol is an example, isn't it?

[8 : 48] It's not wrong to have a glass of wine, to have alcohol, as long as it's not in excess. But is it wise around those who we know have struggled with alcohol in the past or struggle with it now to take them to the pub or to drink alcohol in front of them?

There are certain things which we do which might not be a problem for us, which can cause others to stumble. So we have to watch ourselves. Other things which we're allowing, which aren't only affecting ourselves, but they're affecting those around us.

So Jesus goes on, again, speaking of relational sins. And he says, starting in verse three, So watch yourselves.

If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them. And if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day, and seven times come back to you saying, I repent, you must forgive them.

So Jesus, he's speaking here about broken relationships. And it's sad, but it's true, isn't it? That even in the church, there are many broken relationships.

[10 : 07] There are many people, perhaps, that we don't get on with. But actually, as believers, we're one body, there should be unity. The church, of all places, should be the place where there is unity.

And the reality is that the church is full of sinners, isn't it? It's full of forgiven sinners. It's full of broken people. So, you know, there is going to be a relational breakdown.

But as Christians, we're to strive to mend those broken relationships. Not just for our own sake, but for those, for the sake of the body.

We should love everyone as God loves everyone. God loves each one of his children. So it does say rebuke. If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them.

But what's the goal of rebuking? Well, it's rebuking from a place of love. It's not rebuking to prove that I'm right, to get one above that person that I don't get on with.

[11 : 18] But the goal of rebuking, it's reconciliation. Because what does it say next? And if they repent, forgive them.

The goal is forgiveness. Now, if there's someone which you know you have bad feelings towards, it's probably not wise to jump straight into a rebuke, is it?

Because it's not going to come from a good place. So the first thing that Jesus says directly before that is watch yourselves. So first, we need to check our own hearts.

And you know, a rebuke, it doesn't have to be. You know, an angry talking to. You know, it can be taking a friend aside gently and just pointing something out in their lives.

And we know, don't we, when someone's spoken to us out of love or when they've spoken from a wrong place. we need to be those who rebuke, not because, you know, we're hurting ourselves, but because we love that brother and we want that relationship to be mended.

[12 : 27] Romans 12, verse 18, it says this, if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. And so we need to do, we're commanded to do all we can so that we do live at peace with everyone.

And that's especially true for believers, isn't it? We need to, we need to make peace with our brothers and sisters because we're a family. And it has an effect on the church as a whole.

So first of all, before you rebuke, watch yourselves. Check your own hearts. Is there any sin in myself which has caused this relationship to break down?

And the answer probably will be yes. Even in, however small or however big it is, there's going to be something there. And we need to prayerfully come before God and ask him, you know, where am I wrong?

Where do I need to repent? And that's important to come from a humble place. And then, yes, there are times we gently rebuke but it's out of love for that person.

[13 : 39] And then what's the goal? It's forgiveness. It's reconciliation. Verse, verse three again. Rebuke them and if they repent, forgive them.

Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying, I repent, you must forgive them. Now, I don't know about you but if someone came back to you seven times in a day and said, I'm sorry for what I've done, they go back and do it again.

They come and ask you for forgiveness. They go and do it again. They come and ask you for forgiveness. They do that seven times in one day. Do you think they're, you know, are you going to be suspicious that their repentance is genuine?

I think you probably would be. But Jesus is almost, it almost sounds over the top, doesn't it? But we're not to be concerned with the genuineness of that person's repentance.

We're to forgive. We're to be willing to forgive again and again and again. There should be no limit to our forgiveness. And why, you know, why should I forgive my brother if he's not genuine?

[14 : 54] Well, why should God forgive you? We sin again and again and again and again, don't we? And we've done far more against God than anyone will against us.

So if God is willing to forgive us, then surely we should be able to forgive that brother who Christ has died for. And I'm not saying this is an easy thing, actually.

I think forgiveness can be one of the hardest things. things that we're called to do. But our motivation comes from God, doesn't it?

He first loved us, therefore we love others. He forgave us, therefore we're to forgive one another. But we must forgive. If we're Christians, we must. It's a command.

Now, what do we do when we struggle with forgiveness? forgiveness? When it's almost like we can't forgive. We say the words, but those memories, you know, they replay in our heads over and over and over again.

[15 : 59] I think bitterness is a real stronghold in our lives, isn't it? Especially when we've been harmed. You know, this might be something really, really tough that we've had to deal with.

It might be something really serious that someone has done against you. But if they repent, we're called to forgive and we're called to strive to mend those relationships.

What does forgiveness mean? Well, if you said, I've forgiven this person, then it means you don't bring it up again with that person. It means you don't bring it up again with anyone else.

It means you don't bring it up again with yourself. But how do we stop our, you know, our brains from going back to that place?

Well, God, God can truly forget, can't he? But for us, that can be a struggle. Well, I want to give this analogy. Perhaps when you're on your computer, every so often you'll get a message that pops up and it's maybe an update for something.

[17 : 10] And if you're anything like me, you don't really read it and you click try later or you cross it off. Maybe that's not the right thing to do. But actually, when it comes to our bitter thoughts, that is the right thing to do.

When those thoughts come into our head, straight away, we're not to let those fester, but we're to deal with them. We're to click the no thanks button. Comes up again, click the no thanks button.

And actually, we need to do more than that, we need to pray for that person. We need to pray for our enemies and we pray for those who hate us. So you use those thoughts when they pop up in your head as opportunities to pray for that person.

And some of the best advice I've heard on this is, you know, if there's someone that you're really struggling to love, actually, Christian love love is always an action.

And the best thing that we can do is to act in love towards that person, to do something for them, maybe to spend time with them. And when we act in love, often the feelings will follow.

[18 : 21] But Christian love, it's not a feeling, it's an action. So we act in love and often the feelings will follow. Because it's hard to manipulate our own feelings, isn't it?

Often we don't feel in control of our own feelings. But we're to act in love. We're to pray for one another. And we're to love one another. Now I don't think it's a coincidence that the disciples, straight after Jesus speaks of forgiveness, what's their response?

The apostle said to the Lord, increase our faith. And I think we all need more faith to forgive, don't we? But what's Jesus' reply?

Well he says this in verse six, he replied, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, that's a tiny, tiny seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, be it rooted and planted in the sea and it will obey you.

Now that reminds me of Hebrews 12 verse five and Paul describes the root of bitterness. And often bitterness, unforgiveness, you can feel like a root, a deep-seated root inside of us, can't it?

[19 : 39] And so maybe it's quite apt that Jesus uses this analogy of a mulberry tree. Now the rabbis, they would say of mulberry trees that they had such an extensive root system underground that they would live for 600 years and it was impossible to pull one of these trees up.

It was a deep rooted thing. But Jesus says if you have the tiniest faith, this tiny seed amount of faith, then you'll be able to say to this tree, be it rooted and be thrown into the sea just by your words.

So is it about the size of our faith? No, Jesus says if you have a tiny faith, a tiny amount of faith, you can do the impossible. So what is he saying? Well the truth is this, it's not the amount of faith that matters, but it's who our faith is in, where do we place our faith?

And I'll give you this analogy from my life. When I left school, I had a gap year and I travelled Africa.

One of the things I did when I was in Zambia was I did a bungee jump off a bridge over Victoria Falls. Now this is one of the most terrifying things I've ever done.

[21 : 00] This drop was 111 metres. I think it's one of the biggest bungee jumps in the world. Ridiculous. You can barely see over the edge. Now I have to admit, when I did this jump, I was feeling pretty scared.

I didn't look courageous when I jumped off that bridge. Some people were doing these amazing dives off that bridge. But I was shaking. I might have had a little bit of a push.

I remember watching the video after it and I had all this adrenaline. I thought, I've done something amazing and I just looked so pathetic just flopping off the edge of this bridge. It didn't matter in one sense how much faith I had in that rope because the truth was I didn't have much faith at all.

It took all that was within me to barely inch off that bridge. But what mattered was the strength of the rope.

What was I putting my trust in? I was putting that tiny bit of trust that I had in a strong rope. And maybe someone else could have this old dusty rope which is going to snap.

[22 : 19] They can do the most courageous superman dive off the bridge but they're putting their faith in the wrong rope, in the wrong place. It's not the size of your faith, it's where you're putting your faith.

Who are you putting your trust in? Where are you putting your trust? Now these things we've spoken about today, they're tough. Trying to get rid of sin in our lives, trying to get rid of unforgiveness in our lives, trying to forgive others.

These are all tough things. And if I was just to stand here and say try harder, try harder, try harder, you're not going to get anywhere. We don't have the resources in ourselves to deal with these things.

But with God, all things are possible. And God, God has to change us, doesn't he? And so with all of these things, we have to trust God, and we have to come to him in prayer, and we have to include God in the process.

It's not the amount of faith we have, it's who we put it in. We put it in God. Hudson Taylor, one of the first missionaries to China, an amazing man of faith, he said this, it's not a great faith in God, but a faith in the great God.

[23 : 43] What is he saying? It's not the size of our faith, it's the size of the God that we put our faith in. God is able to deal with our sin.

God is able to change us. We need to trust him, we need to continue bringing these things to him in prayer, we need to continue in relationship with him, and he will change us, he can change us, and he does change us.

Now finally, what's the motivation for all this? You know, maybe when we've done something really tough, like forgiving someone, you know, love someone that we find hard to get on with, maybe in dealing with sin, are we tempted to pat ourselves on the back?

You know, do we say, you know, look how great I am, look what I'm doing for God? How should we see ourselves before God? Well, what does he say?

He says, we're undeserving servants at the end of the day. So reading from verse seven, suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep.

[24 : 57] Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, come along now, sit down, eat. Won't he rather say, prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink.

After that you may eat and drink. Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, we are unworthy servants, we have only done our duty.

So what's the picture here? Well, this servant, he's already worked all day, he's been plowing in the fields, he's worked up an appetite. I'm doing some plowing at the moment and I'm definitely working up an appetite.

But as a servant, he's got to come back and he can't say, you know, where's my food? But it's his job to prepare the food for his master. He's got to continue to work.

He's not going to say to the master, oh look at all this work I've done for you, I've plowed a whole field for you. No, that's his job and that's who he is, he's a servant. And how do we see ourselves before God?

[26 : 06] Do we think that we, you know, we deserve recognition, we deserve favour because of the things that we do? Well no, the truth is we should see ourselves simply as servants to God, we should have humble hearts.

And I think one of the biggest causes of breakdown in relationships, it's pride, isn't it? It's that that person has hurt me, that nobody has hurt me, and who are you to say that to me, to do that to me?

But we're to see ourselves as servants, servants to God and servants to one another. And the truth is God has done everything for us, hasn't he? He's forgiven us, he's given us his son to die in our place.

There's nothing that we can do to earn anything from God. Jesus has earned it all for us. But what should we see ourselves? We should see ourselves as servants, we should walk in humility before God.

That's our motivation to do all of these things, it's because we're serving one another. together. You know, we get rid of the sin in our own life, the bitterness which harms relationships.

[27 : 23] Why? Because we're serving God and because we're serving one another. I think this is fascinating that just how many times the word servant comes up in Luke.

And I looked it up, 27 times the word servant comes up in Luke's gospel. Jesus is talking all the time about who are we going to serve. And we said at the beginning didn't we, the context of this was Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees.

He said they were trying to serve two masters. They were claiming to serve God but they were serving money. And we might think in our lives we're serving ourselves but the truth is as the Bible points out time and time again, we're never really serving ourselves.

we're always slaves to something else. The Pharisees they were slaves to money. Perhaps we're slaves to our own pride. That's what causes bitterness within us.

Sin is a hard task master. What does Jesus say? He says take my burden upon you, take my yoke upon you. My yoke is easy, my burden is light and you will find rest for your souls.

[28 : 38] Jesus is the one we want to serve. And amazingly Jesus is the one who served us. And so I'll close in prayer but in a moment we're going to sing this song, The Servant King, of the one who came to serve us.

What's our response? We're to serve one another. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word and we thank you for the wise teachings of Jesus and we thank you for the amazing example of Jesus that though he is God, though he was God, he did not come to be served but he came to serve and to give his life for sinners.

You loved us while we were sinners. You loved us while we were your enemies and you chose to forgive us. And we look at our own lives and we struggle with relationships, we struggle with bitterness, we struggle with unforgiveness and yet you've forgiven us of so much more than we could ever forgive anyone else, we could ever be asked to forgive anyone else.

So we ask now that you would overwhelm us again with who you are, you would reveal to us just the extent of your forgiveness to us, how great our debt is to you and yet it's completely taken away.

And we ask that you give us hearts not of pride but of humility and of love towards one another, that you would enable us as a church, as a body to reconcile with one another, to love one another and to serve one another.

[30 : 32] Father we pray that you give us humble hearts and you'd help us to serve you with our lives. Amen.