



October 2, 2016

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"The Faith to Forgive"

– 2 TIMOTHY 1:1-14, LUKE 17:5-10

- Many people have feelings of hurt and resentment because of what someone else has done against them. The righteous are often wronged by the wicked. But Jesus tells the disciples to forgive to the extreme. When they ask for special help, Jesus tells them to do their duty before they worry about themselves.

Today's sermon is about forgiveness. However, if you read the scripture passages as we have just done, you will see no mention of forgiveness! So what is going on? Did I just re-use an old sermon that has nothing to do with today's scriptures? That would be awfully lazy of me? Don't worry, I have not

On the surface, according to LUKE, today's sermon should be about faith enough to throw tall trees in to the sea, or slavery...

Here's the thing however... sometimes in an effort to keep our readings short on Sunday morning, we cut out some important background information. This is definitely the case this morning with our Luke Passage. So I am going to fill you in. In order to catch the meaning of Jesus's teaching on forgiveness, we must start at the beginning of Chapter 17. Then we can see what Jesus is teaching His disciples.

I will now read Luke Chapter 17 starting at verse 1: 'Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. 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.”

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”

He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.”

Now you see where forgiveness comes in? Jesus is teaching the disciples how to behave as followers of Jesus! And in proper Presbyterian fashion, Jesus makes three important points about living as followers of Jesus.

The first point is this: We must not withhold rebuke or forgiveness from believers. Jesus teaches the disciples not to withhold rebuke from believers... especially new believers. If we do, we might cause them to stumble and fall away from Jesus... and that is an action that is even worse than our own death!

Note that God does not threaten to kill us if we don’t rebuke and forgive generously, Jesus only says that it would have been better for us to have killed ourselves rather than cause a believer to stumble. And remember... Jesus loves to make a sharp point. The point has little to do with suicide or God’s vengeance, but rather that we should rebuke and forgive others like our life depended on it!

You see, rebuking and forgiving other believers is hard. It’s hard the first time... to get up the courage to tell someone you feel like they sinned against you. How about the seventh time? That is a maddening idea.

Imagine, you are working with a friend on their car and they get angry and call you stupid. Not very nice, right? Do you just ignore it and keep working? Or do you say, “Don’t call me stupid, that bothers me?” That’s the first part: rebuke. Then your friend says “Ok I’m sorry. Let’s keep working.” Then, twenty minutes later, you drop a wrench or something and again, your good friend calls you stupid. What do you say? “Don’t call me stupid, remember?” to which your friend gain says “Sorry.” Now you are starting to get hot under the collar. Not even twenty minutes goes by and it happens again! Now, how many of us would be able to repeat this process or rebuke and forgive?

I know I begin to wonder and get angry... I would think, I told my pal three times!!! Now they must be doing this on purpose... I should rage quit helping them to teach them a lesson in respect. It would be hard for me to go a fourth time. How about a seventh time?

It is no wonder the apostles respond to Jesus saying, "Increase our faith!"

That brings us to the second point that Jesus makes to his apostles. The second point is that God has given us the faith to forgive. Jesus responds to the disciples request for patience by saying that even the smallest grain of faith can do amazing things. Uprooting a tree and throwing it into the sea without a heavy duty machine is almost impossible to do. So is rebuking and forgiving someone over and over again. That's why you often hear angry people mutter things like, "So help me God." It is a mini prayer as much as it is a warning.

In other words, Jesus tells them that the faith they have been given is sufficient to rebuke and forgive someone over and over. This is where our scripture passage from 2 Timothy ties in to the message this morning. "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God." Paul reminds Timothy that God's Spirit in us gives us power... even to forgive someone seventy-seven times. Don't get too hung up on the number, God wants us to be generous in our forgiveness... even to ridiculous levels. Even when we doubt our own ability to forgive... we are told to do it anyway. Even when we want to rage quit, we are told to rebuke and forgive.

The apostles must have doubted their own ability to forgive. The Apostles must have thought that they should be given some "extra" faith to make rebuking and forgiving over and over easier. I say this because of the way Jesus responds to their request for increased faith. Jesus tells them a parable in response. This is how Jesus makes his third point.

The third point is that we are to obey God, to rebuke and forgive, because it is our duty. No special gifts or praise should be needed. Our proper attitude toward God is that of a slave to their master. As I say this, I have to give a warning to you. God does not condone slavery. Slavery, and the resulting racism in America is a

hot issue. We can see this in all the recent rioting over police violence and the Black Lives Matter movement. So I want to be very clear, Jesus does not teach anyone to own another person. In fact, Jesus teaches the opposite. Using an image from the slavery of the time does not condone slavery.

In this case, this morning, Jesus tells us that we are to act like humble slaves to GOD... not to another person. In first Corinthians 9:19 Paul says, "Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible." Paul gives us the example of being a slave to all people for God. In other words, we are to act as if all others are our masters and serve them dutifully. In Romans 1:1 Paul introduces himself as, "Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus." Paul is also a slave to God. This is the proper attitude we are to have toward God.

This is not because God is a cruel master in the sky. God loves us completely. In fact, God is the only one I would EVER want to be a slave to. This is because I believe that God is ALWAYS looking out for my best interest. So if anyone ever tells you that the Bible condones human slavery, you might want to gently rebuke them and invite them to do some Bible study with you!

Back to the third point that Jesus teaches us on forgiveness this morning, we are to obey God, to rebuke and forgive, because it is our duty. The Apostles thought that maybe, they could get some extra faith to make rebuking and forgiving others easier. But Jesus reminds them, and us, that we should do everything for God with the attitude that, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty."

Even Apostles need to be reminded of their place in relation to God. This is because rebuking someone who sins against you is hard. Forgiving them is hard. Especially over and over. It hurts. Our emotions get charged. Rebuking and forgiving others repeatedly causes us to suffer. But, a dutiful slave will push through suffering to serve their master. Jesus is encouraging the Apostles to do their duty so that just like we read in Matthew 25:23 on the day of judgement we might hear God say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' God loves us, very much. But God also knows better than us. And so God urges us to follow the model of Jesus, who was a slave to God even

unto his own death. God doesn't expect us to do anything that God in the person of Jesus Christ would not do.

Jesus teaches us to rebuke and forgive another who sins against us. And he teaches us three important points about forgiveness this morning. First, we must not withhold rebuke or forgiveness from believers. Second, God has given us the faith to forgive. And third, we are to obey God, to rebuke and forgive, because it is our duty.

And it is always my prayer that we would serve God faithfully in this life so that we might all hear God say to us 'Well done, good and faithful servant!' When we are raised up to live with God in the new heaven and new earth forever.

AMEN!