

Discipleship is for the Lowly

Luke 17:1-10

Outline/Summary

Four Discipleship Themes

1. Forgiveness (1-4)

What is a Stumbling Block? --probably more serious than you think.

Lit = a temptation to sin, a cause for someone to go astray

- *It's not about no one ever being "offended" (common use today)*
- *It's not necessarily about "things indifferent" (on which Christians disagree) like whether Christians can partake of alcohol or watch certain movies...*
- *It's not necessarily about tempting someone to go do something bad*
- *It's also not so much talking about single occurrences of stumbling blocks here and there – but **something more ongoing: being** those "through whom they come" (1).*

"This is serious stuff – proof of that is that those through whom stumbling blocks come will have God's fiercest judgment."

Examples of Stumbling Blocks: False teaching; false gospel ; legalism ; antinomianism

"Stumbling blocks are those who, knowingly or not, seriously lead God's people astray"

The Pharisees were perfect examples of stumbling blocks. Jesus' strongest rebukes were for them:

Matthew 23:13-16 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. ¹⁴ ¹⁵ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves. ¹⁶ "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.'

Who/what are "little ones"? --his disciples, his sheep, his metaphorical children

- *The little ones are the outcasts that Jesus has called to himself*
- *The Pharisees hate these kinds of "little ones"*
- *Jesus said the kingdom is pictured in little children (needy, dependant, trusting)*
- *The Pharisees were certain the kingdom was built upon their rigor, strength, faithfulness*

"Woe!" – Prophetic exclamation to announce judgment

*Their (stumbling block) judgment will be **worse** than being thrown into, pulled down into, and drowned by the sea.*

Be on Guard/Pay attention to yourselves! --Stumbling blocks are inevitable

- *On guard to not ever be overcome by a stumbling block – to not be led astray*
- *On guard to never become a stumbling block*

(The Set Up--“Don’t you just hate those Pharisees?”) It’s just then Jesus tells them to forgive...even people like them. Forgive their stumbling blocks.

- *It’s one thing to keep forgiving people who are a constant annoyance, or with whom you often disagree, or those who mean no harm but just seem to be natural-born-jerks. (patience)*
- *It’s one thing to keep forgiving one who intentionally continues to do you harm – to get you fired, to embarrass you in front of others, to malign you falsely to others, to turn others against you. (love your enemies)*
- *And it’s quite another to forgive those whose mission seems to be your spiritual and eternal ruin. (even your most dangerous enemies--scandalous!)*

“Which is worse – an annoying person or a real stumbling block?”

“What’s worse – gossip against us or attempts to lead us astray from the truth?”

See: **DISCUSSION 1**

So Jesus talking about stumbling blocks no doubt would make the disciples think about the Pharisees, and just when they’d be tempted to “be on guard” by being mad at those snakes, Jesus goes into forgiveness and says....(v 3)

- ***Forgive others’ stumbling blocks or offenses***
 - *If you’re brother sins, rebuke him (3)*
 - *If he repents forgive him (3)*

“Notice how rebuking here is the right thing and the loving thing – it’s in hope of their rescue and your restoration.”

- ***Keep Forgiving***
 - *Seven is a number of completeness (eg, Psa 119 – “7x a day I praise you”)*
 - *Jesus made this especially clear in Matt’s acct of the same teaching on forgiveness*

Matthew 18:21-22 Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

He means that there is no limit.

The Command for ongoing forgiveness exposes a lot of fake forgiveness:

- *Never allowing ourselves to be hurt. Never letting others close enough to be hurtful. Or never acknowledging being hurt because that’s vulnerability.*

- *Responding to hurt with a measured forgiveness that actually elevates ourselves... proof we took the higher moral ground...and makes you somewhat in debt to me.*

Jesus' approach – When you truly forgive someone even once, you are making yourself their servant, not their master. You are giving control rather than controlling them.

“Forgiving someone again and again ought not to get harder and harder.”

The truly forgiven (forgiven by God) should be those who are effusive and liberal with their forgiveness.

Lk 7 - “He who’s been forgiven much, loves much. He who’s been forgiven little, loves little”.

*See: **DISCUSSION 2***

2. Faith (5-6)

Interesting timing: right after Jesus said you have to forgive and keep forgiving.

This is a good instinct; to see a lack of faith as the root of the problem. What God says to do might not feel like the right thing to do; it might feel like an impossible thing to do, but we simply trust and obey.

Notice too that they willingly and openly acknowledge their lack of faith... the right thing to do ... He already knows our hearts better than we know them ourselves.

Notice that they rightly ask God for help. It is expression and demonstration of faith to ask for more faith.

Jesus' response: Is Jesus' point really that our faith is so small, it's pathetically smaller than a grain of mustard seed? ... Instead I think Jesus' point is that the size of faith doesn't matter.

“Even the smallest faith is great when it's fixed on a great God.”

“...faith is like a window through which we see something. What matters is not whether the window is 6” or 6’ – what matters is the size of the God that we’re looking at”

“It's not the amount of faith that saves -- nor the consistency of the faith, nor the fervency of the faith that saves -- it is the OBJECT of faith that saves.”

D.A. Carson

Jesus is talking about faith in the same way he talked about forgiveness. We're tempted to think of great faith as something so strong. Jesus challenges what the disciples are asking for. Are they asking for strong faith that can do amazing things? Or are they looking to the God who can do anything? Discipleship is for the lowly, so Jesus doesn't encourage us to

have great faith – but to look a great God. We don't look at the window; we look through the window. The window isn't great; it's there for us to see Him and he is great.

See: **DISCUSSION 3**

3. Obedience (7-10)

Jesus' point is not that He is thankless taskmaster, but that we ought to think a little different about service and reward. We're not to serve him with strings attached...

*See the theme: When we've done seriously hard sacrificial service for the Lord and for others, we're tempted to wait our pat on the back... to feel good about ourselves... but Jesus will have none of that. **Discipleship is for the lowly.***

"Disciples are the ones who know that when they've done everything they should have done, they are at best unprofitable servants."

2. *Not the labors of my hands
can fulfill thy law's commands;
could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears forever flow,
all for sin could not atone;
thou must save, and thou alone.*

3. *Nothing in my hand I bring,
simply to the cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless, look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Savior, or I die.*

Rock of Ages, Augustus M. Toplady, 1740-1778

See: **DISCUSSION 4**

4. Thankfulness (11-19) -- Next Time

Study Helps and Application

Discussion 1: Stumbling Blocks. A more Biblical view of what a stumbling block is can again expose our ugly pride. Ryan asked us a couple of important questions:

“Which is worse – an annoying person or a real stumbling block?”

“What’s worse – gossip against us or attempts to lead us astray from the truth?”

- Now that we’ve answered this correctly (the latter)... *why do we not act/feel like it?* [the former offends our pride and the latter often tickles our ears...]
- We were warned to forgive those who are stumbling blocks (next topic) but also not to **be** a stumbling block.
 - Is this simply a call to be nicer to one another? [No] Why not? [true stumbling block leads people away from the Gospel, spiritual ruin...]
 - How do we avoid being a stumbling block? [Make sure we are proclaiming the true gospel in love... including the rebuke/forgive model to follow]

Discussion 2: Forgiveness. As we read vs 3 & 4 we can’t help but notice that though we are talking about our brother’s sin, the focus is on us and the imperative (command) is to us.

Luke 17:3-4 Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, 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."

- Rebuke him
 - *Is this easy or comfortable? Is it a command? [Are we called to ease or comfort?]*
 - *What happens if we fail to do this? [Offender may not know, can’t repent, restoration process cannot begin, resentment and bitterness grow, ...]*
- Forgive him - *Is this a call to be a doormat? Why [not]? [yes and no ...]*
 - *no [don’t forget the command to rebuke the one who sins against you... there is an expectation of repentance]*
 - *yes [this teaching isn’t about the offender, it’s about us!--we have been forgiven so much more! Go Deeper--Matt 18:21-35]*

Discussion 3: Faith. A terribly misunderstood concept-- Our culture has tended to associate “faith” with terms like “leap of” or “blind” and making it an irrational act. **Biblical faith is a believing trust and is not irrational.** Since we know Jesus was not teaching us how to empty forests into oceans, let’s discuss what He’s teaching here.

- What is faith contrasted with in Scripture? [think opposites...]
 - worry/fear Matt 6:30-31;8:26
 - unbelief – Greek: faith (*pistis* -- noun); believe (*pisteuo* verb from *pistis*)

“That is why only unbelief is called sin by Christ, as he says in John, chapter 16, “The Spirit will punish the world because of sin, because it does not believe in me.” Furthermore, before good or bad works happen, which are the good or bad fruits of the heart, there has to be present in the heart either faith or unbelief, the root, sap and chief power of all sin.” –Martin Luther
- Can you trust (believe/have faith in) God to grant you forgiveness for others, even when it seems impossible? [God does His most awesome work when we finally realize things are impossible for us alone]. Can you apply this principle in other areas of sanctification? [resisting temptation/growth in holiness, etc... --yes!]

Discussion 4: Humble Obedience. Note how these verses assume obedience. Even if we had perfect obedience, God still owes us nothing. Discuss how our pride makes these so difficult to accept:

- *Humility in sin [we don't have perfect obedience... imagine the servant in this parable being slothful or dishonest--would not the rest have been about a rod for the back rather than reclining at table?]*
- *Humility in creative order [even if we were obedient, we'd be created servants at best. How easily we think we can put God in our debt by a little obedience!]*

Discussion 5 (time permitting): Common Themes: Humility & God-Focus. Do you see both of these themes in each of these areas (forgiveness, faith, obedience, thankfulness)?

Memory Verse

Isaiah 2:11 The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.

Resources for Further Study

- *Holiness by Grace* by Bryan Chappell
- *Unpacking Forgiveness* by Chris Brauns

Next Week's Text:

Luke 17:11-19