

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon Title: Moving On to Maturity, Luke 17:1-10

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INTRODUCTION: In the process of being mature Christians, we're going to look at three important requirements:

1. Jesus told his disciples not to be stumbling blocks.
2. The importance of forgiving
3. The importance of faithfulness

Luke 16 tells us, the life of Christ on this earth had one purpose: to prepare people for the kingdom of God. He invested his time and energy with his disciples. Slowly, over time, and incrementally, he prepared them for his departure from this earth. He knew they'd be confused and hurt, but he wanted them to be prepared to continue on with the message of the kingdom of God. And, we are here today because the disciples were faithful.

Now, in Chapter 17, Jesus moves on to other teachings. He taught them about things which really matter. I like the word *really*, because, there are a lot of things in this world which don't matter. It's amazing how we get hung up on things which really don't matter at all. As a church, we must focus on what really matters: continuing the work Jesus started.

Now, Jesus taught his disciples about moving on to maturity.

First, JESUS TOLD HIS DISCIPLES NOT TO BE STUMBLING BLOCKS.

I actually labored over a better way to say this. I considered optimistic words like, "Jesus told his disciples to be building blocks, not stumbling blocks," but this wouldn't be true to the passage. I also considered "Be cautious," but this wouldn't be true to the passage either. So, here it is again. Jesus told his disciples not to be stumbling blocks.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 17:1-3 ¹ *Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. ² 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. ³ So watch yourselves.*

EXPLANATION: Jesus said we are going to stumble. We live in a sinful world, we are sinners, and we will stumble. This week, I ran into a person from another church who told me she didn't really understand the sermons at her church. I said, “My preaching is real-world preaching, so come on over here.”

How many pastors will stand before you and say, “I am a sinner.”? I know I am a sinner. I am not bragging about it. But, hey, in “real world preaching,” it's best not to try to be someone you're not.

EXPLANATION: Jesus said people will stumble, but he said, underline this: Woe to anyone through whom they come. In other words, we will sin, but sins shouldn't pass through us to other people. We should not be stumbling blocks. And, he said, “to the little ones.” We probably take this to mean children, but it goes further. It also could very well mean little ones in Christ, new believers.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 14:13 says “*make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.*”

SCRIPTURE: I Corinthians 10:32 says, “*Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God.*”

SCRIPTURE: I John 2:10 says, “*Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble.*”

EXPLANATION: But, I believe Jesus was talking about more here than sin in general. In Luke 16, the Pharisees sneered at Jesus while he was teaching in the presence of new followers. This wasn't the only time it happened. Can you imagine new, innocent followers of Jesus, without much knowledge, being overtaken by Pharisees who had much of the Bible memorized?

ILLUSTRATION: I can tell you of several new believers whose spirits were crushed by the criticisms of others. I've come to the conclusion after many years in

the ministry that a continual, critical spirit is probably the worst trait a person can have. The only time I've ever told a church member to shut up was years ago when I'd heard all the criticisms I could take from a man who constantly criticized. This man squelched the enthusiasm of so many, and finally, one day when I had all I could take, I just started yelling as loud as I could, "SHUT UP, SHUT UP, IN THE NAME OF JESUS, SHUT UP!" I really didn't care what the consequences would be. This reprimand was a long time coming.

He was shocked, and I kept going. Then something happened which I didn't expect. He broke down wept uncontrollably. He said, "I am a sinner, please pray for me." Another man was in the room, and he asked the two of us to stand around him and pray. From that day forward, he became the quintessential encourager.

Now, here's Jesus speaking right on the backdrop of being heavily criticized. And, Jesus said it would be better for a person never to be seen again than to cause someone to stumble.

Second, THE IMPORTANCE OF FORGIVING

SCRIPTURE: Luke 17:3-4 ³*So watch yourselves. "If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. ⁴ 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."*

ILLUSTRATION: Repentance is the key. This past week, a young man told me about something he did unintentionally which hurt someone. He asked me what to do. I said, "Say 'I'm sorry. Please forgive me.'"

True repentance means turning from one direction and going another.

EXPLANATION: Again, the backdrop upon which Jesus shared this was clearly after a run in with the Pharisees, who, in their extreme legalism, would have had a hard time letting something go.

This repentance and forgiveness business is one of the simplest concepts in theory but one of the most difficult in practice.

People who are offended tend to hold a grudge, turn it into a story where they are victim, and they tell it over and over. Saying, “Please forgive me,” takes the wind out of those sails.

After a long time in the people business, I am convinced some people cannot live outside of the state of being wrapped up in drama and would be at a loss of what to do if they had only one day of not being the victim of yet another story.

APPLICATION: Here’s a point I want you to consider: If you find that you are incapable of forgiving someone, or you choose not to, you really need to have a long conference with the Lord. And, if you find you refuse to seek forgiveness for an offense you’ve caused, you really need to have a long conference with the Lord. In both circumstances, you’ll find you really have no evidence to convince the Lord you are right.

I like what one commentator said: “Our obedience in forgiving others shows we are trusting God to take care of the consequences, handle the possible misunderstanding, and work everything out for good.”

Third, THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITHFULNESS

Now with all this juggling in your mind, we ask ourselves, where does this leave us, right now? It leave us right where the apostles were:

SCRIPTURE: Luke 17:5 ⁵*The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”*

EXPLANATION: What a great prayer for all of us! *Increase our faith.* Our faith is so pitiful, really, isn’t it? The apostles reached a point where they knew they were following a great man. They knew they had just heard a lesson from a man who knew the value of a soul because he warned them not to be stumbling blocks. And, it was clear he understood the eternal value of forgiveness.

They could have talked about times they were hurt by others. They could have talked about the times they’d been wronged. But, they didn’t because they knew it wouldn’t do any good. Jesus had already said what he meant. And, their only response was, “Lord increase our faith!”

It takes faith to do what Jesus expects.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 17:6⁶ *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.*

EXPLANATION: If you’ve never seen a mustard seed, it is indeed very small, yet it has the life needed to grow a large plant. And, so your faith might be small, but it has the life needed to do whatever God tasks you to do.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 17:7-10⁷ *“Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? ⁸ 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’? ⁹ Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? ¹⁰ 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.’”*

EXPLANATION: Jesus told about a multi-talented servant who could plow, watch sheep, and cook. Would the master tell his servant to join him for supper after a long day, or would he tell the servant to prepare supper and wait to eat the leftovers? Would he say thank you for a job well done?

In this day, even people with modest means hired servants. They paid their servants either wages or gave them a place to stay and food to eat. What Jesus meant here is that the master owes nothing extra to the servant. And, a good servant should expect nothing more. A good servant does what he is told to do.

In Luke 15, we have the story of the prodigal son, who had a jealous older brother who had two extreme ideas of faithfulness. In misery, he stayed faithful to his father, hoping for a reward.

ILLUSTRATION: I remember a few years ago, when an elderly person was in his final days, and family members started helping him and checking on him. I knew what they were doing. They were hoping to be included in the will. But, when he died, he left everything to his church.

CONCLUSION: If you are giving in order to receive, you probably won't receive.

I heard someone ask this question once: "Would you still serve the Lord if there was no promise of heaven?" That's an odd question, isn't it? It's an impossible question to answer because we already know about eternal life in Jesus Christ.

But, as servants of the Lord, I think we should have this perspective: We should serve him, like the servant in the story, and our attitudes should be, "We are unworthy servants. We are just doing our duty."

The great thing about our Savior is he promises to reward those who are faithful to him. Let's make sure our attitude of faithfulness comes from thankfulness for what he's done for us.

PRAYER: *Heavenly father, hopefully we've learned lessons about not being stumbling blocks, about forgiving, and about faithfulness. Help us to grow in all of those areas. Lord, increase our faith.*

I pray for the person who does not know Jesus as Lord and Savior. May today be the day of their salvation. In Jesus name, Amen.

If you've listened today and know you do not know this Jesus, listen to his scripture:

SCRIPTURE: Acts 4:12 ¹² "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

Jesus is your only hope. There is no other.

Please come as we sing.

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