

Title: FORGIVENESS, FAITH, HUMILITY, LUKE 17:1-10
(Chatham, NJ; 10/2/16, AM) [Pd – Exegesis]

Theme: Jesus' pastoral concerns in this passage begin with temptations and forgiveness and end with faith and humility.

Purpose: To encourage us to develop the characteristics of forgiveness, faith, and humility.

Introduction:

1. Pass around a card with several types of seeds taped to it. Ask people to examine them closely, noticing how miniscule they are. (We'll look at them later.)
2. In Luke 17 we begin a set of teachings that seem a bit unconnected except that we know them to be important characteristics of Christian behavior.
3. The first section addresses our communal and personal relationships.
4. The second addresses our faith.
5. The third addresses humility.
6. None of these are unique teachings of the New Testament, but they are unique because of the obstacles that society puts in their way: sinful man resists them.

I. Obstacle #1: We aren't as concerned with each other as we are with ourselves; we are encouraged to be autonomous and not worry about what others think.

A. Temptations

1. An awful reality: temptations are sure to come, 1
2. James lists the process from temptation to death, James 1:14-15
3. The choice to give in is entirely ours
4. However, we are called to consider the consequences for those who put temptations in the way of others, 2
5. By comparison Paul's assertion that those who do such things "deserve to die" in Romans 1:32 sounds mild—they also approve those who do such things
6. Jesus thus warns us to demonstrate concern for others
7. "Little ones" could be new or young disciples, or even children
8. How we behave can affect the lives of others in the community of faith

B. Forgiveness

1. Pay attention to yourselves, 3
2. An exhortation to look at your hearts?
3. Sin, rebuke, repent, and forgive – Jesus distills the process to its bare components
4. We read later that such "rebuking" must come gently and from a spiritual heart, Galatians 6:1-2
5. Personal offences are the most difficult but not insurmountable, and this is about relationship in the community
6. Repent is between the open rebuke and forgiveness: there is an expectation that the person will seek to change
7. At the same time, even if it happens seven times in a single day, we must forgive
8. The inclination is much more toward forgiveness than toward withholding it.
9. Forgiveness is the most powerful glue for any relationship
 - He who forgives ends the quarrel.
 - He who cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself.
 - Forgive and forget. When you bury a mad dog, don't leave his tail above the ground. (*Sourcebook*, Doan, 105)

II. Obstacle #2 – We might feel that we aren't up to the demands of Christ (more of an internal obstacle of our own making rather than one the world imposes on us).

- “Increase our faith!” is the plea of the disciples
- If this follows from the previous discussion, perhaps forgiveness seemed to hard
- Show the cards with seeds!
- Do any of these represent a great deal of faith?
- Jesus is saying you don’t need much to do great things (uprooting a bush was never meant literally; Matthew’s version says “mountain”)
- Any reasonable person knows that we are not talking about using God to manipulate creation as proof of faith: we are challenged to imagine the possibilities of faith
- Might he be implying that they already have enough faith? Of at least that they don’t need nearly as much as they think?

III. Obstacle #3 – A buzzword today is empowerment: something we all should strive for. We live in an age when self-esteem has deteriorated into self-inflation. Power makes us feel important and in control.

- Jesus relates a common household scene: a master who feels no compulsion to thank the servants for doing their job
- Disciples must say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.”
- God is not in our debt because of our service and obedience
- Our relationship with God is not one of reciprocity as it was with the pagan deities: one offered sacrifices and gifts to the gods in order to obtain favor
- We are called to stop looking for temporal praise, accolades, applause, or even thanks: immediate honor isn’t a right
- The pursuit of human glory is an enemy of discipleship
- Having finished our duties as servants, we must still acknowledge our imperfections
- Humility is the one thing that opens us to further growth

Conclusions:

1. The way you behave is an important witness to other Christians as well as to non-Christians.
2. If you want to redeem any relationship, be prepared to forgive, Eph. 4:32.
3. Most of you in this room have at least a seed’s worth of faith; perhaps you just don’t exercise it enough.
4. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Need I say more?
5. In the Gospel God displayed his great love for the world. Won’t you accept his offer of forgiveness?