



“Pay Attention to Yourselves!”
Luke 17:1 - 10
October 13, 2019

We continue together in the Gospel of Luke, where we are going to hear the voice of the Messiah speaking into our lives. We will be in Luke Chapter 17, Verses 1 through 10, and in this text we are going to receive a warning from Jesus and a call from our Lord to pay careful attention to ourselves.

Thinking about this passage of Scripture, I was reminded of the first job that I had as a young man in my teenage years. I worked at You-Be’s U-Bake Pizza in the city of Lakewood. We would make the pizza fresh in the shop, then our customers would take it home and bake it in their own ovens.

I remember a lady who came in often. She was a regular customer. Every time she ordered pizza, she would be emphatic, saying, *No mushrooms on the pizza! There cannot be even a speck of mushroom on the pizza. I am deathly allergic to mushrooms. No mushrooms!*

She would get her point across like that every single time she ordered her pizza. To be honest with you, as a sixteen-year-old young man, I would think to myself, *Is she really deathly allergic to mushrooms? Or is this more of an aversion that she claims as an allergy, so that she does not have any of what she regards as those detestable little mushrooms? Is she really allergic or just grossed out by mushrooms?*

In the end, I think it is fair to say that I was a relatively compliant young man, and I made the pizzas as she ordered them. I was so careful to make sure that there was not even a dot of a speck of a mushroom anywhere near her pizza, because I did not want to have the death of this woman on my hands.

Now, whether or not those mushrooms actually would have had a poisonous affect on that woman’s body, I want to remind you this morning that there is, in fact, something that is toxic to the human soul. No joke. No bluff! It is serious.

There is something that is damaging. There is something that is deadly. There is something that is dangerous. There is something that is harmful. It is sin! It is sin against the Lord. By that, I mean any disobedience to the will of God. By that, I mean any transgression against the Law of God. It is serious. It is dead serious.

Sin can occur in our behavior. It can occur in our speech. It can occur in our thoughts. It can occur in our attitudes. It can occur by the use of any part of our body. There are so many ways that sin happens. And sin is toxic to the soul. Sin damages the church. Sin damages the home. Sin damages.

With this in view, Jesus gives His people warning. As we go into the pages of Scripture once again, there is a serious call to attention that comes from the heart of the Messiah to each one of the disciples, to the church together, and to anybody who will listen with ears to hear.

Listen to what it says in Luke Chapter 17 and Verses 1 through 10. In this text we will be warned against a casual attitude toward sin, an attitude where we would not be careful about how our attitude toward sin might be leading others into sin.

On the other side of things, we are also given this instruction by Jesus that we need to be gracious to those who are truly struggling in sin. We are also given this instruction for those in ministry, those in leadership and Christian service, that they don't get big heads about themselves as they carry out the service of the Lord.

I think all this is here in this text as we see Jesus issuing forth words of caution. Luke Chapter 17 and Verses 1 through 10:

¹And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! ²It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea that that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. ³Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, ⁴and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."⁵The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" ⁶And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. ⁷"Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? ⁸Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? ⁹Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

Let's begin this morning by setting our eyes on the exclamation that is at the beginning of Verse 3, Jesus said to His disciples, *Pay attention to yourselves!* Other translations have it *watch yourselves*. It is a call to caution. Later on, by the Holy Spirit, Paul would say to the Ephesians elders in Act 20:28:

²⁸Keep watch over yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers

Later Paul would also tell young Pastor Timothy, *Watch your life and doctrine closely. In so doing, you will save yourself and your hearers.* So, we see these calls to watchfulness coming to the elders and pastors of the church.

However, here in Luke Chapter 17, Jesus was speaking to the community of disciples, all those who are Christians, and He was saying, *Be careful in relation to sin. Watch out!* We ought to be careful in relation to sin in the same way that a person in a chemistry lab might be careful with HASMAT, hazardous material, because it is serious, and it infects the human condition and it can expand. And it does expand. This is what Jesus said throughout the pages of Scripture.

For those who are in Christ, looking to Jesus, let's begin by laying the glorious foundation that in Christ the ultimate victory over sin is achieved. Our sin offends the holiness of God. He is a judge and our transgression incurs His judgement. It stirs righteous indignation. We get mad at some sin, but God gets mad at all sin in a pure and holy way.

The Lamb of God, the Messiah, was nailed to the cross where He paid the price as a substitute for our sin. There on the cross, Jesus diverted the wrath of God from us and took it upon Himself, so that all those who will repent in their hearts and believe and are in need of a Savior, they are saved. They are right with God. This is the Good News. Believe in Jesus and be saved. This is the word that first and foremost goes out to everyone.

As we proceed through the New Testament, what we find is that even for us who have been brought into the salvation of Jesus Christ, though our sins are forgiven and we are right with God, a remnant of sinful nature still remains. We still get tempted to sin. Have you noticed that?

Do you notice that after belief and trusting in Jesus and Jesus being glorious in your heart, you still feel tempted to do things that you know you ought not to do? There is the old man. There is the new man. There is the old nature, then the Spirit of God brings the newness to us, but there is still a battle against the toxic residue of sin that can afflict our lives and our church and our families.

With this in view, Jesus is saying, Watch out for this. Be careful about this. Fight the good fight of faith against sin. This is what I understand to be at the heart of this passage of Scripture. As I look at the three sections of what is ahead of us this morning, I think there are three poisons that we need to be careful about. We have:

1. Toxin of transgression

Transgression is walking outside the revealed will of God—transgressing against the Law of God. The toxic attitude that can be adopted is that is that we can live outside the boundaries of God's revealed will and still be safe.

The more a person does that, the more others might see them, and they might be tempted to go off to do the same. We need to be careful about this.

There is also:

2. The root of bitterness

When there is sin around us and people sin against us, that is when we can really get upset about things. And we must be careful that we don't have ongoing resentment in our hearts.

Next, there is:

3. The yearning of pride

It is the attitude that I am laboring so hard, and do I have to write my own thank you notes? Doesn't anybody ever notice me, me, me, me, me? It is the attitude that we need to be somehow honored and elevated for the basics of Christian service. There can be an impure thirst for recognition that we need to watch out for.

I think these are the things that this text addresses. As we continue, we need to be watchful in three ways. Let's dig in and see what is here and receive this call from the Lord. First, pay attention that you are:

1. Serious about sin (17:1-2)

Sin is serious in God's sight, so much that in Verses 1 and 2, King Jesus says that it would be better to die a terrible death than to be responsible for another person even being tempted to sin as a result of our example or our influence on them.

In Verses 1 and 2. Jesus says, *Yes, this is a fallen world. Temptations are sure to come. It is going to happen. Woe to the one through whom they come.* Then we have the imagery of the millstone introduced for the one who causes and tempts and leads other people to sin:

²It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea that that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.

Jesus presented a violent picture here. Let's not smooth this over! Jesus did not say, *It would be better to have a millstone tied round your waist; it would be better to have a millstone tied around your ankles.*

No, Jesus said, *It t would be better to have a millstone tied around your neck and be thrown overboard so that you are being strangled and submerged to the bottom of the sea, where you would suffocate with water filling your lungs. It would be better to go through that than to have your example be a temptation for others to enter into sin.* Jesus is serious about this! That is the picture that He presented to us. It is to sober us up, to wake us up, and to alert us.

Here in the context of the Gospel of Luke, we must understand that Jesus had been striving with these Pharisees and they were still there in the picture. Most recently, Jesus had given these vitally important truths about the dangers of the sin of materialism and how easy it is to make idolatry of money and wealth.

Then in response to these pure truths from the heart of God, the Pharisees were sneering the Christ. They made light of Him. They made fun of Him, thus having an influence on all the people around them.

And Jesus was saying, *Instead of what you are doing right now, it would be better for you to be submerged to the bottom of the sea.* Jesus told them this because the Pharisees were going to be responsible, not only for their own sin, but also for those who they lead astray.

For us in the family of God, we do still need to take heed to what Jesus said here. It is a fearsome thing to influence another person toward sin. Even if we are atoned for, Scripture teaches that judgment and discipline begins with the house of the Lord.

So, we need to be thinking about our lives and the affect and the influence that our pattern might be having on other people. Jesus used the language of *little ones* here in this text. It would be better to have the millstone around the neck taking a person down to the bottom of the ocean, than anyone should cause one of these *little ones* to sin.

We think of children, toddlers and kids, and, of course, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or anybody of influence need to be thinking of the affect that your example has on the little ones. That is important. Little eyes are watching. Little ears are hearing. Little minds are learning! Yes, that is serious too.

However, what we also find here in the pages of Scripture is that all throughout the New Testament, the Lord refers to the company of the redeemed, the church community, as His dear ones, His little ones. It is the diminutive language of affection, so that Jesus in Matthew Chapter 11:25:

²⁵...I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

So that in John Chapter 13 and Verse 33 when Jesus was preparing to go to the cross, and going back to the right hand of the Father, He said to His disciples:

³³My children, yet a little while I am with you.

I John Chapter 2, John following the pattern of Jesus said:

¹My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

When Scripture talks about leading the children to sin, it is talking about leading the precious redeemed ones in such a way that they would begin to stumble into sin as a result of the example that we set.

Instead of going through a list of possible transgressions that we might be committing that might be influencing others, I am going to ask you to take it before the Lord right now. Is there

anywhere in your life where you know you are outside the will of God and the affect of your witness might give other people laxity in their walk with Christ?

Is there anything in your attitude, anything in your verbal expression, anything of the choices you are making that are outside the will of God? And it could be that another person is induced and enticed and permitted to commit sin because of what they see you doing. You better take that very, very, very, very seriously!

Once again, I am standing up here wondering who am I to be slamming these things home. I am Jeff, the servant who struggles and sins too. Forget Jeff! This comes from Jesus!! So, just let Jeff be this little guy who disappears. This comes from Jesus! And we need to take that to heart. It comes from the gracious heart of the Savior that if we are outside of the will of God, we need to rectify it through repentance and get back on track.

Pay attention that you are serious about sin, very serious about it. We continue. We are living in a world where temptations are sure to come. We are living a world where even the family of believers still have fallenness inside of them.

Thus, we are living in a church community, Bethel Grace Baptist Church, where the people sitting around us right now are going to be struggling against sin, and sometimes stumbling up and blowing it. What is our attitude to be?

Be careful that you are:

2. Generous with grace (17:3-6)

Be careful that you have a graceful spirit that longs to see people set right with God. Not an attitude where you like to be like one of the Super Mario Smash Brothers, going around and clobbering people, but that you are still willing to address sin out of grace and forgive even when people struggle repeatedly with sin.

Let's see how this is laid out for us, looking again at what it says in Verses 3 through 6, starting in Verse 3:

³Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him...

This verse talks about how he is sinning against you. This is personal sin that happens over and over again. It is a personal grievance. Of course, even when it is not against us personally, we are still called by God to address this issue of sin in the family of the Lord. But what it seems we have here before us is an example of personal conflict.

When we have the sense that somebody has sinned against us, we are to go and address it with them. It even says that we are to rebuke them. Are you ready to be countercultural as a church community? In the community of the world, you don't rebuke people. However, in the church community, you give severe sounding corrections where necessary.

If it is a personal sin, if it is something where somebody has sinned against you, according to this text and others, you go personally, and you seek to set it straight with them. Rebuke them. Help them understand where the sin occurred and get it worked out. It is your responsibility to do that with them. This is the New Testament rule.

Jesus spoke about this also in Matthew 18:15:

¹⁵If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.

If they repent, you have won your brother over. If they don't repent, then you can go on involving more and more people to help get it sorted out. But it starts with Person A going and addressing it with Person B. That is what Jesus teaches.

However, I am concerned that is rarely how it plays out. On the other side, maybe it is playing out that way all the time, and I just don't know about it. But what is so easy and what I think happens all the time is that in the midst of a conflict, Person A goes and speaks to Person C and D.

Person B goes and speaks to Person E, F, and G. And the next thing you know, here comes L, M, N, O, P and then X, Y, Z. Then you have factions developing in the church, when it could have been worked out between Person A and Person B. It could have started there and ended there.

So we need to be careful about how Jesus teaches us to address these issues. We continue and we see that in the church community, there ought to be this overflow of grace, understanding that the struggle with sin is real. Let's read it again in Verse 3:

³Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, ⁴and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

In this language of forgiveness coming to us from Jesus in the Gospels, the underlying Greek language is borrowed from the world of accounting, or at least has overlap with it, because it has the nuance of cancelling, of remitting, of releasing. Forgiveness is like forgiving a debt that is owed, clearing it out.

This does not mean that the person who built up this debt of sin is then immediately placed back up in a position of trust, because those placed in positions of such responsibility, according to the New Testament, they must show character that is trustworthy.

But what it does mean is that when there is the process of restoration, yes, these people are to be fully restored. But what happens instantly is forgiveness, letting them off the hook, not making them continue to live under a weight of the resentment they perceive from us. We forgive.

Brothers and sisters, reading through the New Testament, what we find is that the teaching of Jesus Christ on the topic of forgiveness is nothing less than radical. Wow! There are so many different aspects of where it is a challenge for fallen beings such as us to forgive in the way that Jesus tells us to.

Here in this portion of Scripture, the challenge is about the repeat offender. What about the person who says he is sorry, but he keeps doing the same thing? She says that she repents, but it keeps happening. What do we do when we address the sin, they say sorry, I repent, and then they just keep on sinning over, over, over, over, over, over, over, over again?

Jesus said to forgive them, release them over, over, over, over, over, over, over, over again. The rabbis thought it was honorable to forgive somebody who sins against you—not in a single day but in life in general—three times if they ask for forgiveness. Three strikes and you are out! Jesus said, Forget that!

In our community what if someone comes to you seven times a day and express this contrition? You forgive them seven times in a day. I think that might be a little bit of an exaggeration in all situations, but it might not be. What if a person sins against you relationally seven times in a month? You are going to be flabbergasted! What about seven times in a year?

And Jesus said to forgive them. You may ask if Jesus is *asking* you to forgive a person repeatedly like that? No, He is not. He is using imperatives. You *must* forgive them! This is coming from Jesus to us, and we might struggle with this.

Let me ask you a question. How many of you have ever heard of The Golden Rule? The Golden Rule says:

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

How many of you have heard of The Gracious Rule—the law of grace?

Do unto others as God has done unto you.

How many of you have found in your relationship with God that you have had to go back to Him, confessing sin over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over and over and over again?

How many of you have ever discovered something called *The Besetting Sin*? We have an area in our life that we are weak in. We must keep going back to the Lord repeatedly with the same issue, asking for forgiveness. How much grace do we receive from God? As those who have received grace, we are then to be gracious. Jesus is teaching something radical here.

With this in view, the apostles made the request that came next. Jesus preached this radical willingness to forgive, to not continue to hang people's sin over their heads as they keep coming back for forgiveness and letting them off the hook.

Then with this radical teaching on forgiveness, we have what comes next in Verse 5.

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” ⁶And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.

The apostles were asking for a larger measure of faith, and Jesus said, *No, what you need is trace element of living faith and that will get you far enough.*

The mustard seed was the tiniest seed used in Palestinian agriculture. The mulberry tree had a massive root system. The rabbis commented saying that a mulberry tree could live six hundred years because of their massive root system.

Reading that, I was reminded of Hebrews 12:15

¹⁵See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.

Bitterness is like this massive root system, and it can dig down deep and it is difficult to pull up. Jesus was saying though, *If you will practice faith in the Living God, you will be able to root that kind of thing up and plant it in the sea.*

I think that the idea is that you can't plant something in the sea. It is going to go down and be absorbed and be gone. That is pretty awesome picture that Jesus painted for us, and it comes by faith.

How does faith in such relational context work, with this ongoing struggle? One thing is this: We have faith that we have been cleared of a debt that we can't fathom through the blood of Jesus Christ applied to us.

When we recognize how often we sin, it kind of levels the playing field and will make us more gracious in our character. When we reflect upon the forgiveness of God toward us, our character will be more gracious.

There is another aspect to this. First, we have faith that we are forgiven. Then we have the ability to forgive. But what if this person is taking advantage of us and their requests for forgiveness is not real? What if they are not sincere?

Faith is practiced by believing that God has the ability to handle the one who is disingenuous and that we can let it go and place it into the hands of the Living God. We can entrust justice to God where somebody is taking advantage of our forgiving grace.

We can have faith that God sees the situation with more clarity than we ever will. We can have faith that if there is true and deep foul play, God has the ability to handle it as well, both in this life and in the next.

That is why we need to reflect carefully on Romans 12:17 through 21 where it teaches us to overcome evil with good. *And it says, Do not avenge yourselves.* Leave it to the Lord. He will repay whenever there is something false taking place.

Keep in mind that all along we are to address sin. Didn't this whole passage begin by saying if they sin, call them out on their sin? But if they keep on repenting, we got to understand that the struggle for sin is real, so we must have a forgiveness about us. That is how Jesus wants to characterize His community. Pay attention that you are generous with grace.

As we continue, there is one last toxin to be watchful of, and that is the toxin of pride; having a lot of hot air filling up our heads and hearts. We need to pay attention that, by the Spirit of God, we are:

3. Humble of heart (17:7-10)

I think that what comes next is a parable that almost seems out of character for the character of Jesus and what we are used to reading from Him. But it is related to what we just read about the practice of faith.

In broader terms, these disciples of Jesus, they were going to be going out in ministry. They were going exercise faith, and through them, there were going to be some pretty awesome miracles being performed, some amazing mulberry trees being pulled out.

There were going to be things that were happening and the temptation in the fallen heart and mind might be to get puffed up about these things. And Jesus knew the score with these men. He knew that when they would be off by themselves, they would be having a whispering little discussion among themselves.

Those of you who have read through the Gospels, do you remember what they were having an ongoing debate about? It was about which one of them was the greatest. Sometimes in sport discussions, we talk about whose the GOAT—the greatest of all time.

My boys are getting more and more interested in the NBA. I am an old man in their eyes. I have been around for a while and they are amazed that I saw Magic Johnson play, and they want to know what he was like. They ask me whose the greatest; what is your take, who is the best.

I respond: Magic, Kobe, Kareem. Then I guess I have to admit that Michael Jordan belongs in their somewhere, but he was not a Laker, you see! But there is this whole discussion of whose the greatest.

The disciples were having this debate among themselves about who the greatest one was in relation to the others. A couple of them were even trying to get the two seats in the Kingdom closest to the Messiah, one at His right hand and one at His left. You can believe they would have been thrilled to have their name placard fastened to those seats.

So, knowing this tendency of fallenness in us to be so grand and marvelous in our own eyes, Jesus told this parable to keep us grounded. Verse 7:

⁷“Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? ⁸Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’? ⁹Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded?”

The servant was just carrying out what he was supposed to do. Does the servant get thanked for this? The implication is no, he does not. The master does not go and make much of the servant just for doing what he had agreed to do. The servant should not expect any special treatment for doing what he is supposed to be doing.

How many of you are familiar with the day April 15? Why are you laughing about that? April 15, that is tax day. In the weeks leading up to Tax Day, that is when so many Americans finally fill out their paperwork, and a great number of Americans then pay the taxes that they had not paid earlier in the year. How many of you have ever heard of somebody paying their taxes and then receiving a glowing thank you letter from the head of the IRS, saying thank you so much; you have done so much?

Let’s think about some fundamentals here. God created the human race. He created this green earth, He created it in perfection, and He created man and woman in His image. He blessed them and told them to fill the earth and multiply, and He gave them dominion over the earth. They were to be an extension of His reign over all the things that happen on this planet.

What did they do in the very next chapter? They sinned against Him. God gave that one prohibition—don’t eat from that tree. They ate from the tree. They sinned against the Lord, and from there, they continued sinning against the Lord. From there like them, we sin against the Lord. Then God in His grace and mercy, He devised a plan from ancient days by which we can be forgiven of the sin that we have committed against Him.

The plan was to send Himself, God the Son, into the world in a human body to pay the price for that sin; to die as a substitute in order to satisfy the righteousness of God, so that we can be forgiven, so that we can be restored, so that we can be put back up on our feet, and so that we can go about what we were supposed to be doing all along in advancing His reign on the earth.

In view of all this, we do what we are supposed to be doing and say, *Lord, where is my thanks? Where is my honor?* Where is my recognition? No! That is not how it works. We are doing what we are supposed to be doing.

When we do what we are supposed to be doing, we should not have an entitled attitude that we should have our names written across the stars, because we are only doing what we were called to do in the first place.

The Christian life is a life of service. It is a life of exertion. The sons and daughters of the Kingdom, they work hard for the glorious purposes of the Lord, and the attitude in the midst of it all is: I am so privileged to be a part of this. The honor is mine. Lord, you have restored me. You have forgiven me. You have picked me up. You have set me on Your path. I get to serve Your Holy Name. I get to serve in these golden fields of harvest. I get this privilege. I praise You, Lord!

That is the attitude that we need to have the Holy Spirit creating in our hearts. Jesus said in Verse 10:

¹⁰So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”

Then when we understand that we have been given the privilege by grace, we thank the Lord. The amazing thing about it is that, while this is a teaching from Jesus about the heart of the Christian in the midst of serving Him, it is not the only parable about service from Jesus.

Are these words familiar to you that some will hear from the Master? *Well done, good and faithful servant.* Jesus taught this and some are going to hear that. So where does the balance lie? I think it goes something like this: God rewards those who serve His Kingdom without thought for reward, because their hearts are humble in the Holy Spirit.

God honors those who carry out their calling without yearning for honor. We serve the Lord with none of those kinds of strings attached, because we know we have been graced and we know that He has given us so very much, so we serve His Name with humility. We must be careful of the toxin of pride, lest we grow resentful in the service of the Lord. We must remember that being in the service of the Lord is the reward in and of itself.

So, these are some things that we need to be careful about. Toward the beginning of this message, we laid a very important foundation that I want to go back to. Sin is serious. Sin is toxic. Sin is poisonous and there was a cup prepared for the Messiah. It was the cup of our sin and Jesus took it and ingested it. He drank it. He suffered for our sins. Such was His grace, so that now any sinner who calls on His Name with a repentant heart will enter into the reign of glory with the King of kings.

Jesus died for us. He has paid the penalty of sin and He is the One who will give us power over sin as we walk in His Spirit. Jesus is the One who sets us free. Jesus is the One who delivers us. Jesus is the One who brings us into everlasting life. Jesus is the One who joins us to the life of God. Jesus is the One who saves us.

I think there is a very fitting word for us to use in conclusion in view of that. That word is hallelujah! Hallelujah is a Hebrew word that means *praise the Lord*. Praise the Lord! Hallelujah!!

Let's close in a word of prayer.