

Luke 17A

- As we ended chapter 16 last week, we watched as Jesus put the Pharisees in their place...again
 - Last week the issue was one of recognizing the purpose in God giving men His word
 - And more specifically, we saw how the Pharisees had completely missed the point of their Hebrew Bible
 - That it had been given to tell men of the coming Christ and how they must accept Him on faith
 - Since the Pharisees missed this purpose in the Word being given, they inevitably misused the Word for false and unholy purposes
 - They turned it into a yoke of burdens on the people, as Jesus stated in Luke 11
 - And by their error and misuse of the Word of God, these evil men misled a generation of the nation of Israel
 - They caused any number of Jews in Jesus' day to stumble spiritually speaking
 - They mistaught the Word and they misled the population, and so when the Messiah came, the people stumbled so as to not accept the Messiah
 - And this fact leads Jesus directly into His next sequence of teaching, as we begin Chapter 17

[Luke 17:1](#) ¶ He said to His disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come!

[Luke 17:2](#) "It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.

[Luke 17:3](#) "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

[Luke 17:4](#) "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."

- Jesus moves out of the story at the end of chapter 16 into a teaching to His disciples concerning sin within the Body of Christ
 - He begins with the intriguing comment that it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come
 - In light of what Jesus had just been teaching in Chapter 16, it's easy to see that he's referring to the Pharisees and their false teaching when he says stumbling blocks
 - In other words, it's inevitable that men will come, claiming to be men of God, yet teaching heresy that places a stumbling block before God's children
 - Which immediately tells us two important things about the nature of Jesus concern here
- First, He's speaking about men who present themselves as ministers of God – just as the Pharisees did
 - Think about it...who can cause a person seeking after God to stumble so as to never find the true God?
 - Clearly, it must be someone who has credibility in the eyes of the seeker
 - It must be someone who has reason to be believed on matters of God
 - It must be a false teacher
 - That's why Jesus is talking to the disciples when he says this word
 - His concern is that someone within the church might repeat the error of these Pharisees by presenting himself as an authority though he is without a genuine faith
 - And as a result, he leads others astray by his false beliefs
 - Paul warns the church at Corinth about this same concern in these words:

[2Cor. 11:13](#) For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

[2Cor. 11:14](#) No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

[2Cor. 11:15](#) Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

- False apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as followers of Christ, Paul says
 - And they follow the pattern set by their master, Satan
 - But they will receive their just punishment
- The second thing we learn about these men by Jesus' application is that they cause people to stumble through their misuse of the Word of God
 - Remember it was the Pharisee's misuse of scripture that Jesus cited in Chapter 16 to indict their leadership
 - So it will be with anyone who is a stumbling block
 - These will be men who are false disciples of Christ
 - And they misuse God's word
 - But more specifically, they misuse it in the same manner, I believe, that the Pharisees misused it
 - Rather than teaching it in such a way that it reveals Christ and draws men to Him
 - Instead they teach the word in a way to build up themselves in the eyes of men and to enrich themselves
 - Like the Pharisees before them, these stumbling blocks will be men who seek the praises of men and have a love of money
 - The Apostle Peter puts it this way:

[2Pet. 2:1](#) ¶ But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

[2Pet. 2:2](#) Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned;

[2Pet. 2:3](#) and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

- He says there will be false teachers
 - Who introduce heresies
 - Who malign the way of truth
 - Many will follow them even as they malign the truth
 - They exploit people out of greed
 - Doesn't this sound exactly like the kind of people the Pharisees were
 - And these are the people Jesus is warning the disciples about
 - Not that Jesus believes these men will become like these false teachers (other than Judas of course)
 - But rather so that they might be on guard against such men and protect the flock against them
 - And did you notice that Jesus said these men will come
 - You can't prevent it
 - He says its inevitable
 - They have existed throughout the time of the church
- So what is Jesus expecting the Disciples to do with this knowledge?
 - First, Jesus uses it to remind them of the certain judgment that awaits these men
 - Jesus says they would be better to end their life early by drowning then to go forward with a life that leads men astray
 - It seems to suggest that the punishment reserved for the wicked carries with it degrees of severity, so that some will receive a greater punishment than others
 - Yet the punishment for all is eternal, so we obviously don't have a complete understanding of what this will be like

- Thankfully, we never will
- The second thing Jesus tells them to do in response to the coming false teachers is in verse 3
 - Be on guard he says
 - Meaning, as undershepherds, they must be on guard against false teaching so as to protect the sheep
 - This is the basic and most important duty of anyone in church leadership
 - And it's a principle repeated throughout the NT
 - In John 21:16, Jesus leaves Peter with the command to Feed His sheep if he loves Jesus
 - Feeding being a picture of feeding spiritually, meaning through the teaching of the word
 - And I might add the meat of the word
 - Because the proper and consistent delivery of God's word to His people is the essential duty of church leadership
 - That's what Paul means when he tells Timothy in his second letter to preach the word
 - When you look at that passage from 2Tim 4, you find Paul saying that the reason it was so important for Tim to preach the word is because there is so much false teaching going around
 - In other words, the solution to false teachers who might make men stumble is to counter the false teaching with sound Biblical teaching
- Now consider where Jesus goes next in this teaching in verse 3
 - Since the disciples must be on guard at all times against false teaching, it was necessary for them to be ready to challenge anyone they might find teaching wrongly
 - But Jesus doesn't want His direction to be misapplied, because after all everyone teaches error sooner or later (except me of course)

- Every teacher is fallible, so sooner or later false teaching will occur
- But there is a world of difference between false teaching and a false teacher
 - False teaching is simply a fact of life for all of us
 - We all will make mistakes in our teaching from time to time
- But false teachers are unbelievers who can never help but teach false things because they do not have the Spirit of God and therefore they are not of God
- So Jesus wants us to be careful not to jump to the conclusion that everyone who teaches falsely is going to suffer the fate of the Pharisees and men like them
 - So He instructs the disciples to be ready to rebuke one another in the face of sin
 - And though I believe this direction applies to any kind of sin, of course
 - I also think it's specifically directed toward the sin of false teaching
 - The sin of misleading God's children
 - And if the leadership observes this happening, the first step is to rebuke (epitimao)
 - Meaning a stern warning or a censure (cutting off from teaching)
 - And if this results in repentance then the leadership should forgive
 - Which could include restoring the person to teaching
 - But what's implied here is if the rebuke doesn't result in repentance, then the rebuke stands
 - Meaning the censure stands
 - The person is no longer to teach if they don't teach according to truth

- If their sin in teaching error (or any other sin for that matter) causes God's children to stumble, then they should remain outside a position of influence
- And then to illustrate the point one step further, Jesus adds that if this cycles repeats itself many times, then the disciples are to show inexhaustible patience toward this person
 - So imagine a person who keeps trying and failing in their best efforts to teach or disciple or lead others in the church
 - But they consistently fall into sinful ways, whether through wrong teaching or wrong conduct
 - So they must be rebuked at each turn
 - And likewise, if each rebuke results in true repentance, then the leadership cannot hold this against them
 - Even more dramatically, they can't hold the pattern against them
- Can you appreciate the significance of this statement?
 - It's one thing to forgive someone for an occasional mistake and restore them afterward
 - But what if the person makes mistake after mistake time after time? The same mistake even
 - And yet what if they are declare they are sorry (repentant) for each one?
 - At first we are willing to forgive
 - But sooner or later, doesn't our patience wear out?
 - And don't we begin to doubt the confessions they make?
 - In fact, in the face of repeated sin, aren't we tempted to say I think it would be best if you stayed out of a leadership role altogether
 - We would assume that they have proven themselves to be unworthy of our trust
 - Despite the fact that they are repentant, we simply say they have run out of chances

- Jesus says we can't do that
 - There is no limit to the number of mistakes someone may make
 - Perhaps Jesus means that his rule applies so long as we believe they are sincerely repentant, yet the scripture isn't stated that way
 - So we need to be careful about coming to that conclusion
 - In fact, when we have someone who has fallen into a pattern of making multiple mistakes
 - And sought our forgiveness multiple time,
 - Don't we begin to feel like that person owes us something?
 - Don't we begin to feel like a debt is owed to us for our willingness to show so much forgiveness
 - You may never have thought if it that way, but if we're honest with ourselves, I bet you would agree that you share in that tendency
 - We are forgiving, but forgiveness only goes so far
 - But Jesus says, it has no limit
 - What a remarkable teaching
 - For a Jew, asking for forgiveness was a way of incurring debt
 - When you required someone's forgiveness, you were placing yourself in their debt
 - So to say that you must extend grace and forgiveness to someone indefinitely was a very difficult teaching to accept
 - It implied we would be willing to allow someone to incur an infinite debt to us
 - While this concept isn't quite as concerning to us today, in Jewish culture it was a huge expectation
 - Which explains the disciples' response in verse 5

[Luke 17:5](#) ¶ The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”

[Luke 17:6](#) And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and be planted in the sea’; and it would obey you.

- The disciples are so taken aback by the requirement to show such limitless forgiveness, they exclaim that Jesus must increase their faith
 - What they are telling Jesus is we don’t know if we can do what you just asked us to do
 - Hey are saying that unless you do something to supernaturally prompt us to this behavior, we’re not sure it will happen on its own
 - But Jesus will hear none of it
 - He tells them that they have more opportunity to obey then they recognize
 - And He teaches them this through an interesting comparison
- Jesus says that if they only had the smallest amount of faith, it could be sufficient to do something unimaginable
 - A mulberry tree can stand nearly 35 feet tall and it has a very extensive root system
 - So Jesus picked this example to emphasize the difficulty of the task
 - But only a very small amount of faith would be necessary to accomplish such a difficult task
 - That’s the point of referring to the mustard seed
 - Such a small seed represents the smallness of the faith required
 - This is a direct rebuke of the disciples, speaking of rebukes
 - He tells them that He doesn’t buy their excuses
 - If they want to obey His seemingly impossible command to forgive the brethren a limitless number of times
 - They only need the smallest amount of faith

- Why? How is that possible? When is the last time you commanded a tree to go into the ocean?
 - Yet don't you have at least enough faith to equal a mustard seed?
 - Here's what Jesus meant.
- The word faith can't stand by itself
 - It implies an object
 - Faith must have an object
 - You have faith in something
 - To say I have faith yet not specify the object of that faith is like saying I have love
 - Love of what you would ask? Dogs, chocolate, sunsets, people?
 - Likewise, when Jesus says they only need the faith of a mustard seed, we should ask what is the object of faith Jesus is speaking about
 - I think the only natural and reasonable answer would be faith in the thing the disciples were referring to
 - In other words, faith in Jesus' words or more generally faith in God's will
 - It was Jesus' words as He taught the Father's will that prompted the disciples to say they needed more faith if they hoped to obey
 - To which Jesus responded they need only have a small amount of faith, meaning faith in God's will, to accomplish great things
- Now consider this...if a tree were to come out of the ground and land in the sea, how would that actually happen?
 - What force would be responsible for that event?
 - God Himself, of course
 - The power would come from God

- And His power doesn't vary in relationship to our degree of faith in Him
- No matter whether we have a little faith in Him or a lot of faith in Him, His power to do what he wills has never diminished
- All that is required is that we seek His will and remain in it
 - So if God revealed to us His intent to pull up a Mulberry tree and deliver it to the ocean
 - And He asks us to command the tree according to His word,
 - Then we could believe that word from God with only a modest amount of faith, and yet great things would still happen because God is the one doing the work
 - Remember Jericho? Only a little faith on the part of the people resulted in walls falling down
 - Remember the nation of Israel at the edge of the Red Sea? Barely any faith among the people, the faith of Moses was enough to see God act to save His people
 - So when Jesus says to the disciples that they should forgive one another many times, they only need a little faith to see that through
 - Because the real work will be done by God Himself in their hearts
 - And they have heard that it is God's will that forgiveness would reign

[Eph. 4:32](#) Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

[Eph. 5:1](#) ¶ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children;

- So Jesus rebukes them to stop looking to themselves and remember that the real power lies with God
 - They are merely God's servants who will do as God directs
 - Consider when their wrong thinking would eventually lead them one day

- If they believed it was their own degree of faith that determined what God could do through them
 - Then when they did accomplish something significant for God, they could boast of how much more spiritual they were than others in the Body of Christ
 - They might get the wrong idea that they were better material for God and therefore they were able to do more for God
 - And what would be worse, they might expect God to reward them for their superior character
- To contend with this thinking Jesus tells this parable

[Luke 17:7](#) ¶ “Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come immediately and sit down to eat’?”

[Luke 17:8](#) “But will he not say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat, and *properly* clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink’?”

[Luke 17:9](#) “He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he?”

[Luke 17:10](#) “So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done *only* that which we ought to have done.’”

- In this parable, several things are immediately apparent
 - Jesus is the Master and the disciples are the servants, just as was the case in the time Jesus walked on earth with the disciples
 - The servants have many tasks to perform in support of the Master
 - Just as the disciples are called upon to obey Christ in many ways and concerning many issues, like forgiveness
 - And Jesus appeals to their thinking by comparing their situation to another one they were all familiar with: slaves working in a home
 - You never thanked a slave for doing what he was told – that is simply the expectation
 - Slaves were disciplined for not doing the right thing
 - They weren’t rewarded for doing as they were commanded

- Can you imagine the silliness of a slave asking for reward or recognition simply because they obeyed the master?
 - Likewise, when the disciples are told to forgive one another and they respond that Jesus will need to increase their faith
 - Meaning He will need to increase their willingness to comply with His expectations
 - Jesus says, you only need to recognize what the master's will is and then act accordingly
 - Don't try to hide behind some imagined limitation of faith
 - Your faith is sufficient, you only need to follow God's will to do great things
 - And since it will be God's power accomplishing the work, don't let pride creep in either
 - God wills, God commands, God does the good work through us
 - We are simply the obedient slave who in the end must acknowledge
 - We have only done what she ought to have done