

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SERIES: *On the Road With Jesus*

SERMON: *Forgiveness and Faith*

Scripture: Luke 17:3-10

Date: August 22nd, 2021

(Acknowledgement to Tim Keller for his series of Sermons on "The Meaning of Jesus.")

Good morning! Our Scripture text for this morning is found in Luke's gospel, chapter 17, starting with verse 3.

Luke 17:3-10 So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

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.

"Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink.'? Would he then thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? 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.'"

Our sermon series is called **On the Road With Jesus**. For the past 3 week's we've been on the road with Jesus and His disciples as they make their way to on the road to Jerusalem for the final time.

The reason we're joining Jesus on this journey is because all along the way, **He is teaching what a disciple will look like.**

Not a Christian, but a Disciple. And you might say, *“Wait a minute...In our culture, the term that many people use to identify themselves as followers of Jesus would be the word “Christian.”* That’s true, but while the terms **Christian** and **Disciple** are related, I don’t think they mean the same thing.

As I’ve been working on this series, I came across a term that may not be all that familiar to you... the term is Nominalism. Ever heard of it? **Nominalism is the possession of a baseless name or title.** A good example would be someone who is called a king of a certain land or country, but in reality would be nothing more than a figurehead, with no power, no real authority.

Nominalism exists in the church as well, as there are Christians in name only. One reason is because it’s pretty easy to be a nominal Christian. A nominal Christian can point to the fact that they once asked Jesus into his or her heart, they attend church regularly or at least from time to time, and will at times participate in the activities of the church...and they will use that as the measuring stick to indicate that they are indeed a Christian.

But in reality, Jesus has no authority in the person’s life, He’s a non-factor you might say...and in the end, it’s difficult to find evidence of a transformed life.

And I’ve read that Nominalism is concerning to many pastors and church leaders, as it appears to be a growing trend in our culture.

A Disciple of Jesus on the other hand, is one who actually follows Him, that is, one who **recognizes His authority, is completely committed to His teaching, and responds by making what Jesus teaches the driving force in his or her life.**

I hope you’re able to see why it’s so important to talk clearly and directly about discipleship, and what Jesus means when He extends the invitation: *“Come, follow me.”*

Because of its importance, let's get back on the road with Jesus this morning, and see what He has to say about something that impacts all of us, and that is how we're to respond when someone offends us...sins against us...hurts us.

Ever been hurt by something someone said or did? And for all of us, the answer is a resounding "Yes", because over the course of our lives, every one of us will be hurt many times by the words or actions of another. It will come from those who are close to us and it will come from those who are complete strangers. It will come in varying degrees, from something that we're able to put behind us fairly quickly, to something that may have to deal with for as long as we live.

And because it's bound to come, Jesus is teaching how to respond in a way that can bring healing to the one who is hurt, and in some cases, bring about change in the heart of the person guilty of the offense. Jesus is teaching about forgiveness, and the faith in Him that it takes if we hope to be able to see it through.

The message is titled **Forgiveness and Faith**, and as always, we'll start by looking making sure we understand **What's Happening** in this passage...take a closer look at **What We Don't Want to Miss**...and consider what Jesus would say is **The Next Step** that each of us needs to take in order to respond to His teaching.

So first,...

1. WHAT'S HAPPENING

Throughout the gospels we'll find **wonderful promises** that Jesus makes – in my Father's house are many rooms - as well as **serious warnings**. We find one here in verse 3 with Jesus warning His disciples to "*Watch yourselves.*"

This warning comes in the midst of Jesus addressing many topics, and it applies to many areas of life, including those times when we get hurt. And then Jesus follows up that warning with some pretty **challenging teaching** about forgiveness....*Luke 17:3-4 "So watch*

yourselves. “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.

And what Jesus is teaching here strikes the disciples as so radical, so extreme, that they say to Jesus, “You’re going to need to **increase our faith!**” *Luke 17:5b “Increase our faith!”*

And so Jesus picks up on that...He doesn’t mention the word “forgiveness” again, instead, Jesus turns His attention to teaching His disciples about how their faith – their faith in Him – can bring this about.

What He tells His disciples is that all they need is just a **smidgen of faith**. *“If you have faith as small as a mustard seed,...*

And then He goes into a story about an owner and a servant... *“Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after sheep...and it’s kind of hard to understand the point that Jesus is making, and what it has to do with forgiveness or faith.*

So let’s take a couple of minutes to talk about...

2. WHAT WE DON’T WANT TO MISS

...in this short but important passage. How about if we start by looking at these words of warning, where Jesus says...

A. “Watch Yourselves”

When somebody says or does something that offends you, that hurts you...where does your attention go?

If you’re like me, your focus is on the person who hurt you...what they did and how they did it...what they said and how they said it. And we just replay it over and over in our mind...the person, the offense, the person, the offense.

We may be fuming...we may feel humiliated...we may be filled with self-pity...but it's easy to focus on the offender and overlook what's churning around inside of us. And maybe that's because it's hidden, underneath the surface, just like a root lies hidden underneath the surface of the ground.

There's a verse in Hebrews that says, **See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. Hebrews 12:15**

This image of a root is helpful in understanding how much internal and external damage can occur when we don't first "watch ourselves."

When there's a plant or a bush that we want to get rid of, it's not enough to just chop it off, right? If you want to get rid of something above the surface, you have to take care of what lies beneath the surface, that is, the roots.

Some of you know that I grow raspberries, the black ones, and I've got about 2 dozen bushes in all. A few years back I planted a couple of red raspberry bushes next to my black ones, but because I didn't much care for the texture or the taste, a few years later I dug them up, roots and all.

Back here in late June, early July I'm out there looking over my black raspberries that were forming, and wouldn't you know there was this one place where a batch of red berries was mixed in with the black. When I dug them up there a year or so ago, there was one bush where I failed to get all of the roots, and so the bush grew up and defiled one of my black raspberry bushes.

Far more serious, when someone sins against us, when someone hurts or offends us, we don't give a whole lot of thought to what it's doing to us. I've often said to people who are angry and upset over what somebody else has said or done, **"Don't let their sin cause you to sin."**

And yet it happens all the time, someone offends us and it unleashes something within us...and *their* sin leads to *our* sin. We end up retelling what they said or did to anyone who will listen, sometimes embellishing a bit just to prove our point. And we think about what we can say or do that will end up hurting them just as bad as they hurt us.

Can you see why Jesus is teaching His disciples – back then and here today – to “watch yourselves.” He cares about us, and while it’s true that somebody else has hurt us, He doesn’t want us making it worse by us hurting ourselves.

But then what? Well, once we’re able to get to a good place in our hearts, it’s at this point that Jesus would have us turn our attention to the one who has offended us. And what Jesus teaches is the possibility of actually...

B. Identifying with the Offender

Identifying with the offender? Really? Boy, that’s a tough ask.

But notice that Jesus says, “***If your brother sins...***” (Luke 17:3)

Don’t overlook the words that Jesus uses here...He’s saying, “*Even though this person has sinned against you, he’s still your brother.*” Or *she’s still your sister.*”

Sometimes when we are wronged, it hurts us so bad we take that one incident and act as if this defines the entire make-up of the person who hurt us. But is that true? If a person says something about you that isn’t true...if someone reveals something about you that was to be kept confidential, does this represent who they truly are?

Let me put it this way: Have *you* ever said something about someone that wasn’t true? Have you ever shared something with someone that you knew was to be kept private? I’ll bet we all have. When you did that, did it define you? Is that time that you messed up an accurate and total picture of who you are and what you are about?

So let's not pass too quickly over the words that Jesus uses here. Miroslav Volf is the professor of theology at Yale Divinity School, and he once wrote these words:

“Forgiveness flounders because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans...even as I exclude myself from the community of sinners.”

You see what he's saying? When someone sins against me, there is no excuse, I don't care if there's more to the story...guilty, guilty, guilty. And therefore forgiveness flounders. All the while, when I say or do something offensive, it wasn't intentional, it was a slight mis-step, there's more to the story...not guilty.

And so as Jesus teaches about forgiveness, it sure looks like He's wanting us to see if we can't find an avenue that will allow us to identify with the person who has done us wrong.

If we're able to do this, then if we do feel the need to talk to someone about what has happened, we're more apt to go to someone who will help us follow Jesus, not someone who will get you more riled up and end up pouring gas on a fire that Jesus is looking for you to put out.

If you're able to do this, you won't contemplate what you can say or do that will hurt them as bad as they hurt you. There may not be one part of you that wants to do this, but as I've been saying all month, the cost of discipleship is letting go of your way of doing life, and embracing Jesus and His way of doing life.

Another thing we don't want to miss...

C. What Is Meant by Rebuke

What does Jesus mean when he uses that word here in His teaching? *Luke 17:3b* “If your brother sins, rebuke him...”

I think a lot of people believe to rebuke someone means to chastise them, again, with the intention of making them hurt as much as they made you hurt. What Jesus is talking about

here is going to the one who offended, not to punish them, but to help them understand, help them see what they did or what they said, and how it hurt you. And how it hurts them.

There is a chance that the person may double down and say something equally offensive as what was said before...following Jesus is not without risk. There is also the chance that the person at that moment, or after having time to think about it, may say, “You know, you’re right.”

This is hard teaching, I know, and it leads to all kinds of “But what about this?” and “What about that?” I get how difficult this teaching is. And so if you have any questions and want to follow up and talk some more about any of this, I just want you to feel comfortable doing so.

I won’t have all the answers, but I’ll try to be a good listener, and together, we can listen to what Jesus would want to say to us. And then I’ll pray with you, that the faith you have – large or small – will be enough for you take steps that in the past, may have seemed impossible.

And it’s this faith...

D. Your Faith

... large or small, that is perhaps the most important thing we don’t want to miss here in this passage.

This lesson that Jesus is teaching today is so hard, that you and I can stand right there on the road with those first disciples and say to Jesus, **“Increase our faith!” (Luke 17:5)**

“We have faith in you Jesus...but not enough faith to do what you’re asking here. You want me to look inside? Identify with him or her? Help them? Are you kidding? I don’t have that kind of faith.”

And Jesus says, “Yes, *you do.*” If you are a disciple of Jesus, “Yes, you do.”

And the rest of this passage is Jesus answer to those who say that this teaching of forgiveness is next to impossible. Jesus begins by saying, “**If you have faith** as small as a mustard seed...you can do this.” *Luke 17:6b. “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.”*

You know, we often think about faith in terms of salvation...put your faith in Jesus, you’ll be saved. But the faith we have in Jesus also has a direct impact on the things we face every day.

And I think this is the point that Jesus is making when He tells **a parable**, the one I said earlier is hard to understand. It seems to be **about a servant serving an owner 24/7, and in the end, the servant is only doing exactly what he is supposed to do.**

We read this parable and end up scratching our heads and say, “*What is this all about anyway, and what does it have to do with forgiveness or with faith?*”

In this parable there are two individuals, the head of the house, and the servant. An indentured servant in this case. Because back in Jesus day, if someone fell into debt, there were two options. Because there was no such thing as bankruptcy, you would either go to prison, or you would become an indentured servant and your job was to serve.

It might be one year, or two or three, however long it took to pay off the debt. And it wasn’t 9 to 5, as I said, it was 24/7.

And we say, “*Why would Jesus tell this parable when His disciples look at Him and say, ‘We can’t do this.’*”

Doesn’t this parable seem to be about roles, and knowing your role? Understanding and accepting what the expectations are. In this case, the servant understanding and doing his role.

And so maybe what Jesus is teaching us is, this: *“You can do this, you can forgive even when you don’t want to... as long as you know and understand who you are...as long as you know and understand who I am.”*

Just hours before being arrested and put to death, Jesus taught a vitally important lesson that again, has to do with roles.

He taught, **“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5**

Our role is not to be the vine. We’re the branch. Jesus says we need to stop thinking like and acting like the owner. We need to know and understand our role...it’s true we cannot extend forgiveness to those who have wronged us if we try to do it apart from Jesus.

But for those of you who have even just a smidgen of faith in Him, not for salvation, but faith that He can help you do what you could never do on your own....you will find that your faith is enough...because He is enough.

It’s part of that relationship that we looked at last week...the personal relationship that Jesus has with His disciples. We come to see that so much of what Jesus teaches about “this” is connected to what He teaches about “that.”

Okay, in light of all that we’ve looked at, what is...

3. THE NEXT STEP

...that Jesus is asking you to take?

For some, your next step may involve **reflecting on your normal response when offended.**

How do you normally respond when someone offends you? Is there a recent example that is fresh on your mind and in your heart...in other words, one that still hurts? Even if you can't come up with a recent example, we've all been hurt often enough to know how we tend to respond.

Is your default response to focus on the one who hurt without giving much thought at all to what's happening inside of you? What you don't want is a root of bitterness lying beneath the surface. Check yourself and make sure that's not the case, but if it is, may your faith in Jesus, your relationship with Jesus be enough for you to find relief.

And that from here on out, when someone says or does something that offends you.. you will hear Jesus say "Watch yourself" so that you compound the hurt by hurting yourself.

Once you've taken that step, your next step may be **trust that your faith in Jesus will help you identify with the offender.**

Does what they did or what they said define their entire make-up? In rare cases it may *seem* that way, but in most cases it certainly doesn't.

Two weeks ago I was up here talking about extravagant love. Near the end of the sermon, I was talking about how someday our sons and daughter will bury us and no matter what they say publicly about us in the days that follow, they'll know who we were and what we were about. And then I proceeded to give two examples of what our sons and daughters might say about us.

I spoke of how one child may be able to talk about how generous his dad was, giving away \$20 every now and then. I gave another example of how a child may talk about how his Dad was a good Dad but did a lot of complaining about other people.

After the message, it turned out that numerous people thought I was talking about *my* Dad because of the way I said it.

I went back and watched it, and was horrified. It did sound as if I was talking about my Dad, and my Dad was never one to talk bad about other people. That evening when I got home I said to Karen, *"This was a bad day."* My heart was heavy. I didn't want people thinking bad about my Dad, I didn't want to offend people who knew my Dad and what kind of man he was.

In fact, I didn't want people who don't know me thinking this is who I am. Karen tried to encourage me, and said, *"Bill, people who know you know that you're not one to bash other people...and it was probably only a few who thought you were talking about your Dad."* I sure hope so.

The point is, when we mess up and we say or do something that could offend, even if inadvertently, we hope that people will not think that this defines our entire make-up, and Jesus wants us to extend this same courtesy to others.

So may the faith that we have in Jesus – not in ourselves but in Jesus – allow us to look to Him to help us do what would be impossible on our own. Identifying, forgiving, rebuking...He is willing and able to help us with all of that...if we just remember our role...and remember His.

One last suggestion for a possible next step: **Understand the difference between a Nominal Christian and a Christian who is a disciple of Jesus.**

I'd like for you to think about this keeping in mind what all we've looked over this past month.

The first week Jesus taught us that following Him does not consist of praying a prayer and then business as usual. This might be the thinking of a nominal Christian. It's easy, but it's not what Jesus teaches. A Disciple of Jesus understands that there is **The Cost of Discipleship** which includes letting go of *our* way of doing life, and embracing *His* way of doing life.

The second week Jesus taught us His way of doing life includes loving others extravagantly, including those who don't believe what you believe. A nominal Christian may say they love everyone, but may choose to overlook how they feel in their heart about certain people or certain groups. A Disciple of Jesus will look to show **Extravagant Love** even to those who don't believe what he or she believes, knowing that this is what will identify them as one of Jesus' disciples.

Last week Jesus taught us that following Him means that **a very personal relationship** exists between Himself and His disciples.

A nominal Christian will go through his or her day with little to no awareness of Jesus' presence, let alone His authority. A disciple of Jesus will experience the personal presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, and discover how to listen for His voice.

And this morning Jesus has taught us that following Him means **relying on the faith we have in Him, not just for salvation, but for practical help in our day to day lives**, including when it comes to forgiveness. A nominal Christian may choose to continue to harbor resentment and bitterness towards someone who has hurt them.... while a disciple of Jesus will not lose sight of the fact that the offender is one who has been made in God's image...with flaws...and then look to Jesus to help extend forgiveness to the offender for the offense.

Becoming aware of the difference between a nominal Christian and one who is a disciple of Jesus is so important...we don't want anyone to be mis-informed; and this is why we've spent the last four weeks listening to Jesus as He teaches "*This is what a disciple looks like.*"

Thanks for walking with me on this road for the past 4 weeks. I just want to encourage you to continue sitting under His teaching by reading His words recorded in the four gospels, and then talking about what you read with others, in order for all of us to grow in our understanding of what it means to know, love and follow Jesus.