Parable: The Unprofitable Servant

Luke 17:1-10
The Unprofitable Servant

Text:

Luke 17:1-10,

1. Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!
2. It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.
3. Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.
4. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.
5. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.
6. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.
7. But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?
8. And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?
9. Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.
10. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which it was our duty to do.
Commentary:

Luke 17:1, 2, Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

I. Jesus said to his disciples following the relating of the parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus,

A. It is inevitable that occasions of stumbling will occur.

1. Perhaps the rich man had contributed to the lost condition of his brothers.

2. Stumbling meant “the trigger of a trap, contact with which would cause the trap to spring.”

B. Woe to him through whom they come.

1. Jesus sternly warned those yet living to be determined to cause no one to stumble, be lost.

2. Jesus is teaching here that tempting others to fall away from God, to sin is a grievous evil.

3. The scribes and Pharisees were doing their best to cause the disciples to stumble, doubt Jesus and stop following him.

C. It would have been better for the one who caused another to stumble to have a millstone hanged about his neck and that he be
thrown into the sea than that he should have caused a little one to stumble.

1. Execution (physical death) is a better fate than to be guilty of setting a trap to destroy the faith of others and to be lost in hell because of it.

2. “Little ones” refers to babes in Christ, those not yet rooted and grounded in the faith, new converts who are yet weak and dependent.

3. A millstone weighed 40 pounds. Hung around the neck would make it impossible for a person so thrown into the sea to save himself. He would certainly drown.

Luke 17:3, 4, Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

I. Take heed, be on guard in regard to yourselves.

A. Watch your step!

II. If your brother sins, rebuke him.

A. Wesley said, “Forgiveness is due only to real penitents.”

B. Summers, however, stated, “It is foreign to the intent of Jesus to ask, ‘But what if he does not repent?’ The followers of Jesus are not justified in holding a spirit of unforgiveness just because no apology is offered.”
C. Many sins are committed unintentionally.

III. If your brother repents, forgive him.

A. Jesus often taught on the subject of forgiveness.

B. Matthew 18:21-35, Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet and besought him, saying Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.
So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

IV. If your brother sins against you seven times in a day and seven times in the day returns to you confessing and repenting of his sins, you are to forgive him.

A. Some of the Lord’s teachings are difficult.

B. Jesus is here emphasizing the sin of an unforgiving spirit.

Luke 17:5, 6, And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

I. The apostles replied to Jesus,

A. “Lord, increase our faith” that we may live in keeping with even these very difficult teachings.

B. Actually the faith they possessed was enough to enable them to do what Jesus asked.

C. So it is with us!

II. Jesus said to the apostles,

A. “If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye would say unto this mulberry, sycamore tree, Be thou rooted up, and be thou planted in the sea, and it would obey you.”
B. Miller pointed out that “genuine faith can accomplish what experience, probability and reason would deny if it is within God’s will.”

C. “Rabbis of intellectual eminence were often called ‘uprooters of mountains’ in allusion to their powers of solving difficult questions.”

D. “Mountians” in Jewish usage as here intended by Jesus did not refer to literal mountains.

1. However, faith with bulldozers and explosives may well move mountains literally and spiritually.

E. Jesus here emphasized the sin of overlooking the power of faith.

Luke 17:7-10, But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which it was our duty to do.

I. This parable has the following components:

A. A slave plowed his master’s field and kept his sheep.
B. When he finishes the outside work he is not made a guest at his master’s table.

C. Instead, he prepares his master’s meal and later, when all work is done, he is fed.

D. The master does not thank the slave for his service because the slave was only doing that which was expected of him.

E. When we have done all God commands us we can only say, “We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.”

II. Jesus here teaches that no man can merit salvation.

A. Jesus teaches humility and obedience.

B. Faith so powerful that it can move mountains will not earn, merit salvation and we must not be prideful nor vain – glorious if we possess such faith.

C. Salvation is still by grace through faith.

III. Christians under different figures are called both friends and slaves.

A. John 15:15, Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

B. Romans 1:1, Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,
C. Even if a person should do all that is commanded of him, he still would not have put God in debt to him to save him. Salvation cannot be earned!

D. Russell wrote, “This rebukes the self-satisfied Christian who thinks that in obeying God he has done something especially meritorious.”
Unprofitable Servant

Questions

1. It is a most serious thing to offend others. How can we avoid offenses? How can conflicts be resolved? ______________________
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2. If our brother trespasses against us, we are to rebuke him. If he repents, we are to forgive him. What if he doesn’t repent? __________
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3. Is it mentally and physically healthy to fail to forgive, to harbor grudges? ________________________
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4. How often are we to forgive those who sin against us? __________
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5. How can we increase our faith? _________________________________
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6. “_____________ of ______________ ______________ were often called ‘uprooters of mountains’ in reference to their ________________ to ______________ ______________.”

7. Is this what Jesus is talking about in verses 5, 6? _________________
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__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

8. When we have done all that has been ______________ us, we are still ________________ ________________.

9. ________________ is still by ______________ through ________________.

10. Christians are called both _______________ and ______________. Russell wrote, “This rebukes the ________________ - ______________ who thinks that in ______________ ______________ he has done something ______________ ______________.”