

**Embracing Humility** *(and all of its implications)*  
*Luke 17:1-10*

*“We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.”*

**Introduction:** It’s hard to blame them, though we often do. The 12 disciples of Jesus came from a diverse number of backgrounds (fishermen, zealots, tax collector) and locations (Galilee and Judea) with most living a rugged, hard working, poor to middle class existence. Then, they were called to follow a local Rabbi named Jesus of Nazareth who started to become well known in the local area through His clear and authoritative teaching, and then national acclaim through progressive miracles. Along the way, Jesus made some veiled and not-so-veiled promises to the rag-tag group of followers:

- 1) They were **promised** to sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel when the Son of man would sit on His throne (Matt. 19:28) - this would have been the hope of every Jewish boy and the place of great honor for any man in Israel
- 2) They were **privy** to Jesus’ **transfiguration** where God broke protocol and told them that Jesus was His “beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him” (Matt. 17:5), as Moses and Elijah talking about His departure which was about to happen in Jerusalem (Luke 9:30-31)
- 3) They were **privileged** to sit with Jesus in the upper room on the night before He died, listening to Him explain the celebration of Passover through the lens of His upcoming sacrifice (Matt. 26:26-29). In fact, Jesus said He earnestly desired to eat the meal with these men, even though they were not ready to receive it (Luke 22:15)

All of these experiences and teachings should have humbled this group, but instead, over and over, it is clear it rather emboldened their own pride, setting their focus on themselves rather than the purpose Jesus had in giving these to them:

- 1) After the promise of sitting on thrones, James and John (along with their mommy) requested that Jesus put one of each on His right and left (Matt. 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45), putting themselves above the others, and getting in early. To this, Jesus remarked that the **greatest in His kingdom will be servants, and those wishing to be first must be slaves**, which would follow the model and example that Jesus Himself set, who came to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.
- 2) After experiencing the transfiguration, where only 3 disciples were with Jesus (James, John, and Peter) a dispute arose among the disciples as to **who was the greatest** (Matt. 18:1-8). It’s not hard to draw a line from chapters 17 to 18 and the source of this dispute. How could these 3 NOT be greater because of what they experienced! This invariably led to frustration, bitterness, and dispute among them. Jesus retorted that **whoever humbles himself like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven** (18:4), and one must become like a child to enter into His Kingdom.
- 3) After spending a night of worship and celebration on the night before Jesus died, the old disputes came up again amongst the disciples (Luke 22:24-30), in terms of “**Who is the greatest**”. This time, they were anticipating receiving the thrones they were promised the near future, since Jesus was wholeheartedly embraced by the nation on Palm Sunday and put down all the religious leaders in open debate on Monday and Tuesday. They could taste their monarchical positions. Now it was simply who got the best parts of the land (who got Judah and who was stuck with Issachar). Jesus taught a vivid and tangible lesson as to the nature and character of His Kingdom by taking an apron and washing their feet, giving them an example to follow in their service to each other (John 13:14-16). Peter picked up this truth in his first epistle (1 Pet. 5:5)

as he called the church to “clothe themselves with humility toward each other”, a direct allusion to Jesus’ washing of his feet.

Jesus was relentless in His message to His disciples: *humility is the what God desires, what qualifies, and what moves us to sacrificially serve one another.* God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5). So humility is a primary ethic for God’s people in His church to operate in, allowing us to put off pride and walk humbly before God and in serving others. Grace Church of Simi Valley will thrive in a healthy existence when we all **embrace humility and service as ultimate values and ethics.**

It’s good to take a few minutes to consider where and how **pride** affects us, as we did with the disciples. Pride is blinding and deceptive, and we often can discern pride in others much more readily and quickly than in our own lives.

- Pride seeks to **justify** all kinds of sin and puts qualifications on obedience
- Pride will **shift and deflect** away from reality, and often will turn to accuse others
- Pride sees ourself in a **better light** than we really are
- Pride plays comparison games
- Pride loves when others fail, puffing up itself
- Pride wants to rank people and sin, in order to minimize both
- Pride sees others as **less important** than ourselves and having insignificant value compared to us (basically the opposite of Phil. 2:3)

Do you resonate with any of these or others like it (careful, it’s a trick question)? This morning we want to look at **Luke 17:1-10**, and how humility is needed for us to work through relationships, in our dependency on God, and our identity as servants.

#### **Humility is Foundational for Loving Relationships (Luke 17:1-4)**

And he said to his disciples, “**Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!** It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these **little ones** to sin. **Pay attention to yourselves!** If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

Before digging into this hard (by implication) text, there are two fundamental issues at play: **1)** As disciples of Jesus we share a common commitment to pursue righteousness and holiness. A person who claims to love God and yet has no desire to obey nor a care to change is NOT a true follower; **2)** We are not to pursue holiness and righteousness in isolation, but rather we are to walk together. This not only provides encouragement but also **mirrors**, where our heart is exposed in the interaction with others. We not only get to serve each other, we grow by dealing with each other’s sin, resolving conflict, and learning to love. The core sentence is the command between two commands: **pay attention to yourselves.** They were to give careful attention, to beware about what they teach others and how they deal with sin. **Relationships have the opportunity to bring out the best in us, but also the propensity to reveal the worst.**

#### **Humble care not to lead anyone into sin**

Jesus gave two overarching realities of temptations around us: **1) they will always be there, 2) they better not come from us.**

#### **Humble connection to rebuke a brother**

Not only are we called not to lead others into sin, we actually are called to lead people **OUT** of it. The first way we do this is to **rebuken or admonish a fellow believer**. Here Luke gives a principle of dealing with sin, where Matthew gave a **process** of how it is supposed to happen. This is not being judgmental nor is it being nitpicky toward people. It is a necessary result of being close together in relationships where sin will come out, often against each other. A few principles on rebuking each other:

- **The goal is to win a brother (Matt. 18:15) -**
- **The process is to start in private FIRST (Matt. 18:15)**
- **We only rebuke what is clearly seen and stands written (1 Cor. 4:1-6) -**
- **We remember that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8; Prov. 10:12; 1 Cor. 13:5) -**
- **We look to ourselves at the same time (Galatians 6:1) -**

#### **Humble conviction to truly forgive**

Perhaps one of the hardest by implication passages in all of Luke. We have been inundated in a culture that is so **easily offended** that we begin to believe that we deserve ease and comfort, miffed if someone has the audacity to disagree with us or live differently. There is such an upswing in litigation that not only are we allowed to **sue for anything** and **ACTUALLY WIN**, but we have created an unsustainable cultural reality where any death or pain in the hospital is the doctors fault (should be sued), any arrest is the police officers fault (should be sued), and any trip in the foyer of a building is the builders, owners, and janitors faults (and they ALL should be sued). This comes out of an unbiblical view of **self**, truly believing life is about us, that others are there to serve us, and anyone who is contrary to that is wrong (and probably should be sued).

**Forgiveness is the choice to remember a sin no more, to hold a sin against another no more (Isaiah 43:25).** This is not a “forget about it” decision, but one that says I will not hold this sin against you by not making you pay for it. It releases the person forgiven from **earning** their standing with us, and stops expecting a pound of flesh, but instead replaces all of this with grace, unmerited, radical, and God lavished opportunity.

Forgiveness is a transaction that can happen in the moment, and is the foundation for things like rebuilding trust, respect, and leadership, which are also choices but take time to rebuild.

In the parallel teaching of Matthew 18, Peter asked the question “How often should I forgive my brother”, which if we are honest, that is **THE question we ask**. Once, ok. Twice, you’re stretching it. **7 times in a day**, or **seventy times seven** like He told Peter! Now you’ve lost me. Doesn’t this mean the person is really not repentant? Doesn’t this embolden a sinner?

Am I just being taken advantage of? These are good questions that Jesus does not address. He simply says we are to **consistently forgive** so that we can be made whole, restored, and reconciled. A few principles to keep in mind:

- **We forgive just like God forgave us (Eph. 4:32) -**
- **God is Offended by sin much more than we ever should be (Psalm 51) -**
- **I have been forgiven an unpayable debt (Matt. 18:23-35) -**
- **When I fail to forgive, God will not forgive me (Matt. 6:14-15)**
- **Lack of forgiveness is a sign that we fail to love - either God or others (Luke 7:47) -**
- **We leave the judgment of sin up to God (Rom. 12:19) - It is God’s job and right to judge, condemn, and pour out wrath, not us.**

#### **Humility Operates In Dependency (17:5-6)**

The apostles said to the Lord, “**Increase our faith!**” And 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.”

### **Humble to recognize our weakness**

The apostles, those sent out by Jesus who had followed Him closely and fervently, were reeling from this teaching and could only blurt out, **"Increase our faith!"** Do you ever feel like that? The call to follow Jesus is the call to die, the call to turn from self to trust Him, to discontinue living for this world. We are to love our enemies, pray for those who persecute us, and refuse to take vengeance in our own hands. In other words, the call to follow Christ is **IMPOSSIBLE apart from faith**. On top of this, faith itself cannot be conjured up by ourselves but must be given by the gracious hand of God, making us dependent on Him for even that. We are consistently, everyday, weak in our own strength to fulfill what we are called to do. So the distinctive we are called to is admit and embrace the weakness, calling God to increase what He Himself has given.

### **Humble to depend on Future Grace**

Now notice what Jesus reminded them. They did not need MORE faith, by quantity, since even the smallest of faith, like that of a mustard seed could make a deeply rooted tree to rip out of the ground. In other words, the disciples were NOT lacking enough faith given by God's grace, they simply needed to exercise the faith that had already been given to them.

The disciples did what we often do, **"I can't do that!"** I can do a lot of different things, but I cannot do \_\_\_\_\_. This is not about "can't", its about "won't". The way to grow, or increase, in faith is to exercise the earth shaking faith that has already been given to every believer. When we make truth informed, faith driven decisions each day, regardless of the discomfort or temporary pain, we grow in our ability to trust the Lord implicitly, wholeheartedly, and joyfully.

### **Humility Delights in Servanthood (17:7-10)**

"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'? Will 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'? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

### **Humble to see our function as a servant**

This brought Jesus to the final point of his long discourse, and he ended with a summation of the need for humility. So He told a story of a servant and owner to illustrate the function and mindset needed for a **faith driven, Grace defendant, forgiveness offering, willingly rebuking, and stumbling avoiding disciple**.

A servant worked in the field all day, every day. Each day he would work hard from sun up to sun down. At the end of the day he would enter back into the house and would be greeted with the familiar response, **"you stink! Go and change your clothes because I can't eat with that stench in my nostrils. Change so that you can serve me my dinner. When I am done, and only when I'm done, can you eat your dinner."** No thanks given, no acknowledgement of work done, and no expectation that anything would change tomorrow.

This is our life. **"So you also..."** was Jesus summation of identity. **We are servants.**

Specifically, we are HIS SERVANTS. We serve, following His commands because He has bought us, purchasing us with His blood, and He owns our life. In this life, we are not looking for acclaim or praise, but by faith believe that **WILL COME** (well done, good and faithful servant - Matt. 25:21). But as for today, we serve for the joy of honoring our King. We serve without expectation of reward today, even thanks. How often are we upset when we do something and NO ONE EVEN THANKS US. For a counter-cultural follower of Jesus, we are not seeking the temporal reward but the eternal one. **We like the idea of serving until someone has the audacity to actually treat us like a servant!**

### **Humble to keep the mindset of a servant**

But Jesus goes on to say that we not only serve, we do so because we are **unworthy servants**, doing only what we ought to have done. Notice that Jesus calls out our position, who we are, and by doing so calls out our identity. An **unworthy servant is WHO WE ARE, and that is who we are in this life!** We never outgrow this status, but by faith we embrace it more and more, causing greater joy and effectiveness. Our life is a perpetual result of God's lavish love, grace, and mercy. We are not seeking honor and praise in this life, knowing that we will dine with the King in the future. When we embrace this mindset, forgiveness becomes possible. We care about others in a way that goes beyond what they can do for us. We are not easily offended because we know what we truly deserve. We are quick to love, quick to give grace, quick to cover an offense, and quick to grant mercy. This is distinctive living from a distinctive gospel.

A few implications to ponder:

- We maintain unity by staying humble in differences
- We serve each other, not just in ways we WANT to, but in what is needed - 1 Thessalonians 5:14 - *"And we urge you brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all men."*
- We willingly pursue each other, overcoming our insecurities and selfishness by humbling ourselves in the same way our Savior did - to the point of death, even death on a cross