

Luke's Gospel: Chapter 17

Service, Thankfulness and the Kingdom...

Temptations to sin (Luke 17 v 1 to 4)

What does Jesus mean when he speaks of “temptations”, also translated ‘offences’ (v 1)? The Greek word used here is *σκάνδαλον* (*skandalon*), and it comes from the word for a ‘bent stick’, a stick that springs a trap or sets a bait. The word also was used for a ‘stumbling block’, something that people trip over. In the Bible, sometimes a *skandalon* is good – in that people ‘trip over’ Jesus, and are offended by the gospel (Romans 9 v 33; 1 Corinthians 1 v 23; Galatians 5 v 11). But among brothers and sisters in Christ, a *skandalon* is bad. It can be false advice (Matthew 16 v 23); or it can be leading a brother into sin by our ‘liberty’ (Romans 14 v 13); and division and false teaching can bring a *skandalon* among God’s people (Romans 16 v 17)...

- “Woe to the one through whom they come” (v 1), one such person being Judas Iscariot. Psalm 41 v 9 predicts his betrayal, but does this take away the responsibility for his action?
- “Little ones” (v 2) includes children, but also refers to those who are young in faith. Why was Jesus’ condemnation of those who cause young believers to sin so severe?

“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him” (v 3) – even if we find it hard to forgive someone because they won’t repent, we must not harbour bitterness in our hearts. Remember, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23 v 34). When Joseph told his brothers, who had sold him into slavery, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50 v 20), he did not suddenly come to that realization. It was his state of heart for a long time; but relationship could only be restored after his brothers had repented, and Joseph spoke healing and forgiveness...

Increase our faith (Luke 17 v 5, 6)

“Increase our faith!” (v 5) – on this occasion, the disciples are extremely perceptive. They recognize that great faith in God is needed to get along with people in a forgiving way. The roots of the mulberry tree were thought to be extraordinarily strong: this tree could stay rooted for six hundred years. We may have unforgiveness and bitterness deeply rooted within us, but through faith, Jesus can rip those roots out: the tree can be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea. The faith that counts has more to do with *what kind* of faith it is, rather than *how much* faith there is. A small amount of faith, as small as a “grain of mustard seed” (v 5), can accomplish great things, if that faith is placed in a mighty God. Jesus goes so far as to say, “Nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17 v 20).

Unworthy servants (Luke 17 v 7 to 10)

- What characteristics of a true Christ-follower are shown in these verses? “So you also” – note the demand for personal application in verse 10.

“We have only done what was our duty” (v 10) – we are forever in God’s debt; our work for him is never done! When we realize all that God has done for us in Jesus, we will want to serve him out of gratitude. When our hearts are right, we will be happy to have the privilege of serving God. Many of us today want to project a ‘super-Christian’ image that makes us anything but “unworthy servants”. We only think we are better than others when we look to man, instead of Jesus. But spiritually mature believers will not be proud or arrogant about their spiritual ‘status’...

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Jesus cleanses ten lepers (Luke 17 v 11 to 19)

“As he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers” (v 12) – it was not unusual for groups of lepers to congregate together. They were outcasts from society at large, and had no company other than other lepers.

- What was required before the lepers could be healed? What did Jesus expect of them afterwards? Can we learn anything from this, for our own prayers?

“Go, show yourselves to the priests” (v 14) – Jesus asked them to go to the priests while they were still lepers – this was truly stepping out in faith! “As they went, they were cleansed” – just as God blessed the lepers as they stepped out in faith, so he will bless us, as we step out in faith. “One of them... turned back, praising God” (v 15) – only one came back to give thanks; and he was a “foreigner” (v 18). “Were there not ten cleansed?” (v 17) – Jesus missed the nine who did not return to give thanks: Jesus notices our lack of gratitude. “Your faith has made you well” (v 19) – there was extra healing for this tenth leper. When Jesus said this, he is likely to have been referring to God’s work within the man’s heart. The other lepers were healed physically, but this leper’s heart was also made whole.

The coming of the Kingdom (Luke 17 v 20 to 37)

“The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed” (v 20) – the Greek phrase translated as ‘that can be observed’ carries the sense of ‘hostile examination’. Jesus tells the Pharisees that their hostile, doubting eyes are unable to see or receive the kingdom of God. “The kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (v 21) – the kingdom of God is in their midst because the King is among them!

- What does Jesus teach here about the nature of (a) the kingdom of God; and (b) the coming of the Son of Man? What is the difference between the two concepts, and what is the connection?
- What aspects of his return does Jesus emphasize? How will it find the world? How should it find his people? In what practical ways can we be ready for Jesus’ return? See 2 Peter 3 v 10 to 14.

“But first he must suffer” (v 25) – the kingdom of God cannot come until the King goes to the cross. Why will Jesus come again in glory? Because he came first in humility and submission unto death.

“The days of Noah” (v 26) – Jesus taught that life would revolve around normal things like eating, drinking, and marriage; but those days were *also* marked by violence and demonic oppression (Genesis 6 v 1 to 5).

“Remember Lot’s wife” (v 32) – Lot’s wife was turned into a pillar of salt as she and her family escaped from Sodom; it was because she looked back (see Genesis 19 v 23 to 26). The awesome reality is that God will give us what we really want. If we want the things of this world, God will let us have them, for a while. But when we really want the things of God, God will let us have them – forever!

“There will be two in one bed... there will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left” (v 34, 35) – Jesus points to curious disappearances, to a ‘catching away’ of some at the coming of the Son of Man. Matthew 24 v 42 to 44 tell us to “stay awake” and be ready, for we do not know at what time the Lord is coming.

Here is the Second Coming dilemma: Is it at an unexpected hour or is it definitely predicted? Is it ‘business as usual’ or cosmic cataclysm? Is it meeting Jesus in the air (1 Thessalonians 4 v 16, 17), or is he coming with the ‘holy ones’ (Zechariah 14 v 5b)? The dilemma is resolved by seeing that there are actually *two* second comings – the first is unexpected, when Jesus the bridegroom meets his bride (the Church) in the air (known as the ‘rapture’, or *harpazo*); the second is clearly predicted, when Jesus comes to the world, *with* the Church, “with power and great glory” (Matthew 24 v 30).

We must be ready, because his coming *for us* is without warning...