

FAITHFUL LIVING FAITHFUL SERVICE

Luke 17:1-19

Sunday August 22nd 2010 Morning Service

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Introduction:

What causes discouragement?

Christians are not immune from such discouragement. We live in the world and face the same difficulties as everybody else. Within the church we can become discouraged by our relationships with one another and in the work we do.

The question is do we have spiritual resources to enable us to handle these discouragements? This passage addresses some of these areas. It is an antidote to discouragement – both in our relationships and in our service.

1. Faithful living (part 1) (vv 1-6):

• **Causing others to sin (vv 1-3a):**

Jesus commences by warning his disciples about those who cause others to sin. *Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to the person through whom they come.* The original is better translated causing to stumble.

Jesus refers to causing *these little ones* to sin (i.e. disciples, especially those who are younger in the faith). It is therefore a warning about causing another brother to sin. This is consistent with Paul's teaching to the church at Corinth (I Cor 8:13; 10:32)

Jesus uses strong language and reinforces how serious a matter it is to be the cause of another believer sinning or to be a cause of stumbling to another believer. Jesus says we are to watch ourselves – avoid the practice of the Pharisees.

• **Being sinned against (vv 3b-6):**

But what if a fellow believer sins against us? Firstly we are to rebuke him. Secondly we are to forgive our brother if he repents. But here is the rub - if he repeats the offence seven times in a day and repents seven times in a day, we are to go on forgiving him. This too is difficult teaching.

So we are warned not to cause our brother/sister to stumble. We are also instructed on the need for forgiveness. So faithful living is set in the context of internal relationships within the body of God's people.

The disciples make a strange request of Jesus. They asked that Jesus would increase their faith. Why did they make this request?

It is a request to be able to live in such a way that pleases God. It is an expression of need. We need an increase in inner strength to live as Jesus would want us to. They did not need an increase in faith. It is not

the quantity of faith we possess. It is rather the object of our faith. It is a question of the person in whom we have faith.

2. Faithful living (part 2) (vv 11-19):

This section is usually dealt with as a miracle of Jesus, which it is. However it is easy to miss the very strong connection between this incident and the teaching that Jesus has just given. This miracle is also an acted parable for the benefit of the disciples.

Leprosy was an affliction that was more than a disease. There was a stigma attached to it. The person with leprosy was unclean. It was not so much that they might be healed – rather that they needed to be cleansed. So here in Luk 17:14 *“...as they went they were cleansed.”*

This follows the OT teaching that lepers were regarded as unclean. They could not be regarded as part of community be were required to live outside the community until they were cleansed. They had to cry out “Unclean” (Lev 13:45-46; 14:1-2).

Here we find the lepers, instead of crying “unclean” they cried out to Jesus *“Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”*

There are two important points here which have a bearing on vv 1-6.

Firstly the need of these 10 men was to be cleansed and re-integrated into society. They recognised that Jesus was their only hope. In crying out to him they demonstrated faith in Jesus (cf. vs. 18). The lepers were doing the very thing Jesus had taught the disciples – they demonstrated faith in him.

Secondly notice Jesus’ response. He told the lepers to show themselves to the priest. Why did he do that? Surely he should have healed them first and then told them to see the priest. That would have been Jesus’ normal practice. They didn’t question Jesus. They didn’t object. They obeyed without any evidence that things were better. And it was in the going that they were cleansed. That is evidence of real faith.

The faith of this one leper was doubly rewarded. His obedience (in spite of the circumstances) was the result of faith which led to his cleansing. It led him to return and fall at the feet of the Saviour and pour out his worship in thankfulness. He was made spiritually well as well as physically well.

The starting place for our faith in Jesus is the recognition that we need his forgiveness. Leprosy is symbol of sin. We are all sinners. We need to come to Jesus for cleansing and for forgiveness. Then we will be declared clean (not by the priest but by God) and accepted by God. That is the starting point.

However we need to continue to live by faith. The man trusted without any evidence that anything had changed and he returned with thankfulness. For Jesus’ disciples this was an acted parable. As disciples of Jesus – so it is with us.

3. Faithful service (vv 7-10):

This section demonstrates that we are to be faithful in our service. vs 10 is an antidote to being puffed up. Jesus presents the picture of the person who owned a servant who had duties in the field and duties in the master’s home.

Jesus asks two questions:-

Would the master expect the servant to eat before preparing the master’s meal?

Would the master thank the servant for doing what he was told to do?

The answer we are expected to provide in both cases is "No"

Let's look at this more closely.

Ques 1:

Jesus often spoke about the need to take the servant role even though we might not be the servant (see Luk 12:35-37; 22:24-27). On this basis Jesus could hardly be contradicting himself. It is a worthy thing for the master to be prepared to take the servant's place.

Ques 2:

It seems out of character for Jesus to be discouraging masters from expressing thanks to their servants when they do a good job.

In the first instance the servant has no right to demand that the master serves him. This does not contradict Jesus' earlier teaching – what he does is out of grace. We can make no demands on him.

In the second instance the term unworthy (unprofitable) in vs 10 is misleading. The servant who works hard is neither unworthy or unprofitable. What is meant is we are servants *without need*. In other words we have done that for which we have been paid to do and we are *without need* of further payment. Nothing more is owed to us by the master.

We must serve as those who are content to do our duty. Our job is to be faithful – to God and to one another and to consider ourselves unworthy servants. Without any expectation that we will receive anything more than we already have.

Conclusion:

We are called to be faithful in how we live and faithful in how we serve. There will always be reasons for discouragement but, if we are the Lord's people, he will give us the faith to live in a way that pleases him and we will be content with his promised that our great reward will be to welcomed into his presence with the words "*Well done good and faithful servant.*" (Luk 19:17). Surely that is reward enough.

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