

THE MILLSTONE AROUND OUR NECKS Lk. 17:1-10 9-11-16

Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. ³So 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 had a servant plowing or looking after the 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 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.' "

KIDS LESSON: Show kids a jar of mustard seeds. Know what it is? [no] How big are the seeds? [very small; let them taste it] Reading today talks about faith as small as mustard seed. How so? Faith is trust in Jesus; we can do all things thru him. Believe and be saved. Where do we want to go one day? [Heaven] How? [Believe in Jesus]

I'm going to ask you some questions. Raise your hand if you think they are true. Bulls hate red. (all are false; bulls hate movement, the red just stands out more). Ben Franklin wanted the turkey as the national symbol. (He wanted an image of Moses) A penny dropped from the Empire State Building would kill a person if it hit them. (It does not have the weight and the flat surface would slow it down; it might cut you).

How about these spiritual questions? Sin is so serious that a person would be better to die than to lead others astray. (All these are true.) Even if someone sins against us many times, we should forgive the sorrowful sinner. We are servants of God by faith.

As our reading today begins, the disciples and others were having a difficulty in living out their Christian faith. They asked Jesus about sin and how they could live as He and God wanted them to live. Sin was a millstone that hangs around every believer. So, we want to learn how Jesus encourages us to get that off our necks. Just to make sure you know what I'm referring to, a millstone was a large flat rock that people would grind grain on. A grinding stone was similar but had a hole in it and was attached to some sort of wheel. Sin was so serious an issue that if we lead others, esp. children away from God, that we would be better off using it as an anchor. This is my millstone (show big rock I have). Anyone want to try swimming with this on? I didn't think so.

Sin is bound to occur, Jesus says. Because of the human condition, we will sin every day despite our best efforts. That is why Jesus had to come. Only he could remove that stain. He knows our sin, our situation, and is our salvation. What boundless love he has for us!

Even though sin is going to occur, we are not to surrender to it. No white flag should arise from our moral fortress. If we are not struggling against sin, we are close to—or may have already—lost our faith. That is especially true if children are involved since they are not mature and easily led astray. If uncle Duley is working on the roof and the hammer goes astray, and certain syllables come shooting out of his mouth, can you hear the nephews say, Uncle Duley, you shouldn't say those words. And it would be esp. tragic if he said it didn't matter and tossed out a few more to boot. If a parent fails to train their children, their faith is threatened. So, watch yourselves Jesus warns and urges. Watch out or the millstone will do its' terrible duty.

A story is told about a man who described this human predicament in terms of two dogs. "We have two dogs in our hearts," he said. "One dog is called Good; the other dog is called Evil. They fight all the time." A friend asks, "Which one wins?" "The one I feed," the man replied. Too often we feed the wrong dog, the dog which urged priority to the trivial pursuits in this life to the neglect of eternal pursuits. The one which howled for my selfish wants. The one which leads us astray.

Another of the millstones, besides leading others to lose their faith was a failure to forgive. If you forgave someone more than once during a day, you were going above and beyond the call of duty. So when Jesus said to forgive seven times (or 77 times in Matt.) the disciples were beyond amazed. Was that even possible? You would have to be Jesus to do that—oh yeah. To forgive as we have been forgiven as we pray in the Lord's Prayer is what God expects of us.

Do WE deserve forgiveness? Have we even gone one day without sin? Not a single person has. Since that is so, since God forgives us over and over we too should forgive the sorrowful sinner who sins against us. Note too the "if he repents" part of Jesus words. Here we need to be very observant. God has forgiven the world in Jesus, right? In that sense all are truly freed of sin. HOWEVER, those who show and have not sorrow over their sin are NOT forgiven before God because they reject his grace through their non-repentance. Yes, we should forgive. But we also dare never become enablers of the abusers of God's grace to think they are in good standing with God. They are not! Sorrow over sin is a prerequisite to being forgiven. Without the first, you can't have the latter.

Remember the definition of forgive? To voluntarily give up your right to get even with someone else. That is a blessing to us, no matter what the other person does. We are forgiving as we have been forgiven. Whether they receive that forgiveness or not depends on the contrition they have—or don't have—in their heart.

Upon hearing this, the disciples were dumbfounded. Don't lead others into sin; forgive and keep on forgiving! They could only cry out 'Increase our faith'. I think it's like saying 'you've got to be kidding. That's impossible! How could we do this?' Increase our faith. Make us like you Jesus.

Jesus was saying to his disciples; the problem is not that you have too little faith. The problem is that you are not applying the faith you have. Then Jesus tells them a strange little parable. He says, "Suppose one of you has a servant who's been plowing or looking after sheep. When that servant comes in from work would you say to the servant, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? No! He says, get my dinner first, then you eat.

Here is a teaching that is so out of step with our times that it will take some reflection. Jesus lived in a world in which slavery was a fact of life. This was the contract the servant signed when he agreed to get a loan or whatever the reason he chose this servitude. In such a world, the master of the house would say, "When you finish your work, come in and prepare my meal. I'm getting hungry." Then, after he had eaten the meal he would not have gone out of his way to thank the servant, nor would the servant expect to be thanked. After all, he had simply done his duty.

To set Jesus' words in a more contemporary setting, we might imagine paying our electric bill. When you send that small fortune off to pay for your utilities, you don't expect a letter back from the power company saying, "Well, done! You paid on time! Keep up the good work! We're proud of you!"

No, we pay our bill because that is our responsibility, particularly if we don't want our lights turned off. Or, when we pay our taxes, we don't expect a letter from the commissioner of the I.R.S. saying, "You are one super citizen. I wish we had ten million more like you." No, we pay our taxes because that is our duty as citizens.

In the same way, because Jesus died for us, we are his servants. How much does God owe you? Not cold hard cash, but favors/blessings/good-things-should-happen-to-me currency? A little or a lot, some or a bunch? The answer is not a bit. That is the whole point of the last few verses.

For all God has done for us, we serve him to the best of our abilities. For the huge hole our sins have dug for us, Christ paid our penalty. It is a debt we could never come close to repaying. Like the unmerciful servant who had a deficit in the high millions of dollars, we would never be able to repay our Lord. Desperate debtors like the whole human race, would only face time in federal prison till we withered away. So, when Jesus comes to pay the staggering sum for us, we then respond in thanks with service and sanctification. "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty."

Now, how many of you agree with this statement? The millstones of sin, lack of forgiveness and trying to earn God's favor plague us all. Only by looking to and living in Christ can we be saved. Everyone, raise your hand!