

Sermon Notes on Luke 17:1-10, Third Sunday before Lent

1. Verses 1-10 of Luke 17 are a unit. These verses are not a series of unrelated thoughts. The verses are related to each other.
2. These verses give us examples of sins which are common to all people. Without the help of God people cannot overcome these sins. These sins are: a) Being an offense to other people. This means to cause other people to sin by giving the impression that it is permissible to sin and to live in it; b) Failure to point out the sins of others so that they might repent; c) Failure to forgive other people when they sin repeatedly against us; d) Expecting thanks from God even when we don't do our duty as we ought to do it.
3. To say to a sycamore tree: "Be rooted up and be planted in the sea" is a miracle. Jesus is not speaking about charismatic faith, a faith to heal peoples' diseases or to raise the dead. He is speaking of the faith which all people need to be children of God and to live as God wants them to live.
4. Natural man is spiritually blind, spiritually dead and spiritually an enemy of God. There is nothing more hopeless than the condition of natural man. What is even worse, natural man denies this. To become a Christian means to realize this lost condition.
5. This text was not addressed to unbelievers. It was addressed to the disciples, verse 1, to the apostles, verse 5. They are the same group of people. The disciples, the apostles, needed to be reminded of their lost condition. The flesh of the Christian tempts him to think that now, since he has become a Christian, he is better than other people. It is dangerous for Christians to think that way.
6. When a Christian reads verse 1 he should say: "Oh Lord, I have caused others to sin. I deserve your condemnation. I deserve to have a millstone tied around my neck and to be drowned in the sea." When he reads verses 3 and 4 he should say: "Oh Lord, I have failed to rebuke my brother when he sinned. Because of that he has not repented. And I did not forgive him. When he sinned against me many times in the day and said: 'I'm sorry' I failed to forgive him. Have mercy on me, an unmerciful servant." When he hears verses 7-10 perhaps he says: "I'm better than that slave. I've worked hard all day for my master. The least he could do is to thank me for working so hard. I deserve more than some of my fellowmen. They don't work as hard as I do."
7. Why did the disciples say what they did in verse 5: "Lord, increase our faith"? Because the Law of God convicted them of giving offense, of failing to call peoples' attention to their sins, of failing to forgive fellowmen their sins when they confessed them.
8. Some people come to church loaded down with a guilty conscience. Their sins make them weary. They simply need absolution, the forgiveness of sins. Other people come to church feeling proud of themselves, proud like the Pharisee who said: "God I thank Thee that I am not like other people." They need to be convicted.
9. How is faith like a mustard seed? A mustard seed is very small but it is a genuine seed. True faith may be small but if it is genuine it looks only to Christ Who takes away the sin of the world, to Christ who came not to be served but to serve, to give His life's ransom for many.
10. To love my fellowman heartily is my constant duty before God. I must take great care not to cause him to sin. I must rebuke him when he sins and then forgive him. No matter how often he sins against me, if he confesses his sin I must forgive him.
11. "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20.

Theme: THE NEED FOR GENUINE FAITH

Introduction: Jesus Once said: "Without Me you can do nothing." John 15:5. Paul said (Romans 5:6): "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Without our Savior we are ungodly and have no strength. No wonder that our text speaks of our need for genuine faith. Christian faith is like a mustard seed. If it is genuine, although it is small, it can do mighty things, not because of us but because of Christ.

I. GENUINE FAITH IN CHRIST FORGIVES US OUR SINS

We sin much every day. Even Christians sin despite their best efforts. Romans 7:15. Forgiveness of sins is a miracle. It is like telling a tree to be uprooted and to be planted in the sea. That's where Christ our Savior and Substitute steps in. A man is justified by faith (in Christ) without the deeds of the Law. Romans 3:28. The whole Bible proclaims forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ to everyone who believes it. Acts 10:43. I cannot rid myself of my sin. I cannot give myself a quiet conscience. But Jesus says: "Son, be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven." Matthew 9:2. And Paul says: "By grace you are saved through faith." Ephesians 2:10. Receiving forgiveness of sins is a miracle which God offers to all people. We say: "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief." Mark 9:24. "He that believes and is baptized, shall be saved." Mark 16:16.

II. GENUINE FAITH IN CHRIST FIGHTS SIN

Our text is addressed to believers, not unbelievers. It is addressed to the disciples and apostles. Our text does not tell Christians how good they are. It speaks of their sins. Offenses are bound to happen. That means occasions on which even Christians might give other people the impression that it is alright to sin. That is dangerous. Furthermore, our text speaks about rebuking our brother when he sins and forgiving him, no matter how often, when he confesses his sin. Christians often fail to warn other Christians about their sins. Christians often fail to forgive their fellow Christians when they confess their sins. They are often like the unmerciful servant who refused to forgive. Matthew 18:23-35. Our text also speaks of the arrogance of our sinful flesh which expects God to thank us although we are nothing but unprofitable servants. God owes me nothing, not even mercy. But faith in Christ fights the good fight of faith. I Timothy 6:12; II Timothy 4:7. The Christian resists the devil steadfastly by faith in Christ. I Peter 5:9. The shield of faith can quench the fiery arrows of Satan. Ephesians 6:16. Genuine faith in Christ fights against giving offense. Genuine faith is concerned about the brother's repentance and forgiveness. Genuine faith thanks God for all gifts rather than expecting thanks from God.

III. GENUINE FAITH IN CHRIST PRODUCES GOOD WORKS

Producing good works is like telling a tree to be uprooted and to be planted in the sea. They are miracles, gifts of God. God prepares the good works for the believer so that he can produce them. Ephesians 2:10. Without faith in Christ it is impossible to please God. Hebrews 11:6. With David the Christian prays: "Lead me, O Lord, in Your righteousness." Psalm 5:8. Jesus is the Vine. Christians are His branches. The Father cleanses the branches so that they bear more fruit. The person who abides in Christ bears much fruit. John 15:1-5.

Conclusion: Like the disciples, we realize our sins and sinfulness. We cry: "Lord, increase our faith." He answers: "If you have genuine faith you would do mighty things." What are those mighty things? Confessing our sins, listening to the pastor who forgives our sins, and fighting the good fight of faith. That is the cure for giving offense, failing to rebuke our brother, failing to forgive our brother often and arrogantly asking God to thank us. God be merciful to me, a sinner!