**Luke 17:5** 5The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.”

I have to tell you that there are a lot of things to be discussed and learned from this text. With that said, what you learn from today’s lesson might actually depend on how you view the lesson itself. As I studied this text and then did some further digging into commentaries there were basically two schools of thought. The first was that this section is to be taken as a series of lessons, in other words snippets of various lessons that Jesus taught and not necessarily lessons that formed a whole. The other way to view these words is to see them as one solid discourse, a follow up to our last lesson, the history of Lazarus and the Rich man which was last week’s gospel lesson. In other words, Jesus is teaching further on the issues of faith and salvation. So that you know, I take the second approach that Jesus is teaching further on the issues of faith and salvation. Again we will basically jump right into our text under the theme: **“INCREASE OUR FAITH.”**

As I said in my opening remarks, I believe these words to be further lessons on faith and salvation following the history of Lazarus and the rich man. Notice that I call it a “history” and not a parable or anything else. I believe Jesus shared the divine knowledge of the ends of a poor beggar and a rich man. The poor beggar, whose life was hard and difficult went to heaven, not because his life was hard and difficult but because despite his life he had faith and confidence in the promises and wonders of His God. In contrast to Lazarus was the rich man who had blessings galore but he let his material world be his everything! As a result of no faith in God, no grasp of his need of God’s grace and love, this man ended up in hell.

In our text, Jesus now highlights a few truths that are important to grasp in the issues of faith and salvation. He starts right where most people, including his apostles and disciples usually have a problem. He starts with the issue of sin. **“Jesus said to his disciples, “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! 2It would be better for that person if a millstone would be hung around his neck and he would be thrown into the sea than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. 3Watch yourselves.”**

Yep, there is sin and it is a devastating thing! With these words Jesus expresses some real truths that even we must grasp. I say we because this is addressed to “disciples,” all believers. First, just the fact that he speaks this way tells us exactly how God views sin. It is not some minor difficulty to be ignored and passed over. You can tell that just by what is said. There is woe here. Even more, to be one who causes sin, who promotes and advances the cause of sin is not a position you want to be in. Clearly the general bent of these words alerts us to the serious nature, the destructive nature of sin.

By the way, I find it curious that we don’t seem to want to translate as the original language does. Look at that first line. We translate **“Temptations to sin are sure to come,”** yet the Greek expresses it differently. The Greek says, **“It is impossible for sin not to come.”** Because of the sin in this world and because of our very own sinful nature we are not going to avoid and get around sin. It is going to happen, it is going to be found in our lives and we are going to be impacted by it. The word here is the Greek word “skandalon.” A skandalon is actually the trap stick of a snare or trap. Think of the little wire on a mouse trap or the stick holding up a box you want the animal to go into. Once the trap stick is set off, the end result is usually demise. Rarely have I seen a mouse trap go off and the mouse does not end up dead. The same here. What is being spoken of is not just some sort of minor intrigue, temptation or some sort of choice we must face. It is a trap stick! It is a devastating and death dealing situation we find ourselves in. Such is the nature of every sin. Every sin, whether you think it is big or small, every sin can lead to eternal death and destruction. Not just temptation, but sin is spoken of!

So, sin does exist and we will have to confront it and deal with its results all the time. But notice who Jesus gives special warning to? Those who cause sin. Those who promote and encourage sin put themselves into special and horrid danger. If you cause “**a little one**” to sin, to be caught in a trap stick so that they die or lose their eternal salvation, God says you are in big, big trouble. In Luke the phrase “little one” is not about age but about weakness about being lesser or little in faith. Should your actions lead a young Christian or a doubting Christian to fall away, God says it would be better for you to die a horrible death first. That’s the point of what is said here. Before you cause the loss of someone’s faith, it would be better if you died hard. If that doesn’t tell you how God views this issue of sin, then I don’t know what will. It is serious. Therefore that simple but pointed warning to each and every one: **“Watch yourself.”** Take care. Take sin seriously. Take God seriously!

The next lesson. **“If your brother sins, rebuke him. If he repents, forgive him. Even if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times returns to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”** So, first we learn sin is serious, then we learn that repentance and forgiveness is serious.

A few quick things here. When you know of sin, it is your duty, your job as a child of God to point that sin out and call for repentance. Your duty! We do this with gentleness and respect, with love and care for the sinner. And when that person repents, we forgive them! We forgive just as we want God to forgive us! I want God to overlook every single stupidity and idiocy of my life, therefore I should deal the same with my fellow Christians. Repentance and forgiveness are important and needed aspects of our lives. As long as our fellow believer repents, we forgive!!

But there is another thing to be considered here. Please note that each sin this person commits is repented of. To repent means “to have a change of mind.” Typically when we speak of repentance we mean not only sorrow over that sin but the desire to stop that sin. In that regard, I do not consider the seven times here to be the same sin committed seven times, but rather to be seven different sins. To do a sin seven times against a person is not repentance. Sincere repentance stops the sin. Sincere repentance must work at stopping the sin. If you have a problem stopping a sin, get help!

Now comes a pivotal point in Jesus’ discussion. It is clear that the words he has spoken have hit home. The disciples are humbled and at the same time troubled. That trouble is seen in the next words. **“The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith.’”**

Did you catch that? It is not the general believers who react strongly but rather it is the apostles of Jesus, those who were appointed to lead and to teach the wonders of Jesus. They are concerned. They grasp the difficulty and struggle that faith is going to be. Forgive? Forgive repentance all the time? Overlook faults of people and don’t be a cause of sin? Lord, for such a task, we are going to need greater faith. We are going to have to be “super apostles.”

Here comes a lesson that is absolutely striking. I want you to know that I truly wrestled with this answer of Jesus. His apostles ask for greater faith and at first Jesus does not seem to address their concern or their desire. At first! Is it possible that they took a wrong view to begin? Is it possible that their request was more about works than faith? In other words are they thinking more in line of what they will be able to do rather than the true nature of faith? In truth, I believe such is true and that is why Jesus speaks the way he does.

**6The Lord said, “If you had faith like a mustard seed, you could tell this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you. 7Which one of you who has a servant plowing or taking care of sheep will say to him when he comes in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at the table’? 8Won’t the master tell him instead, ‘Prepare my supper, and after you are properly dressed, serve me while I eat and drink. After that you may eat and drink’? 9He does not thank the servant because he did what he was commanded to do, does he? 10So also you, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants. We have only done what we were supposed to do.’”**

How do we grasp these words? How do these words answer the apostles? First, a lesson on true faith. True faith can uproot trees, plant them in the sea and all just because you command it. Don’t give me cute stories of how you want something done and years or even days later it seems to come true. That is not what Jesus said. He says that true faith, even small true faith can immediately cause a tree to be uprooted and replanted! Ask yourself, “Can you do that?”

Your answer will be “No!” I have never known a person who by just their command could uproot trees, move a mountain or anything else of said nature. So if you are going to brag about your strong and true faith to me, we are going to step outside and you are going to move trees just saying so. I believe Jesus spoke this way because the focus of the disciples was on them, on what they wanted, on what they hoped to do and be, on how they were going to be the movers and shakers of God’s kingdom. That is what I believe is behind their call for greater faith. So the Lord in a simple but yet emphatic way reminds them and helps them to grasp that this faith, this salvation thing, this getting souls to heaven and reaping the benefits of eternal life is not, NOT about them and what they can do! You and I as humans, sinful humans, will never accomplish what the Lord wants because of us! Our faith will never be enough, even small faith of the power and nature that Jesus describes here is not to be ours. Stop focusing on yourself or on your endeavors!

Thus the next words found. The servant plows all day. The servant comes in and the master says, “Feed me!” That’s what the servant will do. The servant will do the master’s bidding. The servant will follow the master’s commands and recognize the master’s authority to so command him. The servant will do what he is told and the servant is to expect nothing in return. You did your duty. You are totally unworthy. It is all in the Master’s hands!

Our job is to grasp sin, call for repentance and where God’s Word is fulfilled, grant forgiveness in the name of Jesus. We don’t accomplish anything. The plowing is the Lord’s. The food is the Lord’s. The house is the Lord’s. The work is the Lord’s. Everything is in the hand of the Lord. You and I as God’s children just carry out what He says and wants. Don’t expect reward. Don’t expect applause and pats on the back. Don’t expect anything except the wonderful and awesome realization that you got to work in the Master’s house, that you got to be a servant of the Lord, to the glory of the Lord!

In other words, don’t worry about things you have no say over. Instead focus on the fact that you have been called by the Lord. You have been given the gift of eternal life and salvation because Jesus has come to serve as your Savior. You have the gift of eternal life because of Jesus and his power. He is one who could uproot trees and move mountains. He is the one who could and did pay the tremendous debt of sin that we have. He has forgiven us, called us, grants us His robe of righteousness and gives us heaven. Jesus has done it all and will continue to do it all. Faith and salvation, kingdoms and powers, weaker or stronger, growing or not growing is not our concern. Our concern is Jesus and his Word. Jesus and the wonderful, life giving, soul saving, he helps us endure any and all struggle Word is what is important.

The lesson? Cling to Jesus. Hear and follow Jesus. If you think about it, that is just what the Apostles of Jesus do end up doing, well, all but one of them. They stuck with Jesus and his Word. I believe the same is true for us. Our job is recognizing sin, calling for repentance and sharing the wonder of forgiveness. We don’t change what is or isn’t sin as some churches want to do. We don’t change the Word or the truth and power of Jesus again as so many of the world today want to. We stick with the Lord. He will and does take care of all else. Do that and you will have all the faith you need, because it will be faith in Jesus and not in you or in anything humans can do. Thank you Lord, for such a great reminder that it is You that counts. Keep our faith firmly and surely in you and your promises. Amen.