

Faith as small as a mustard seed (Luke 17:1-19)

We have been studying the gospel of Luke together. Today, we will study the theme "Faith as small as a mustard seed", from the first half of cp. 17, vv. 1 to 19.

1. Stumbling blocks

1-2

¹ Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. ² 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.

Jesus says that it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come. (NASB)

A stumbling block is a stone which stays in the middle of the street, which makes us stumble.

Unfortunately, we cannot avoid people which hinder and waver our walks of faith. But we must remember that even when it happens, it doesn't mean there is something wrong in our faith, but it is a problem of the person who caused it.

If we don't understand this well, we might fall into an unhealthy condition where we blame ourselves because of others' problems. If we do this, we are never free from problems.

If we have faults or made mistakes, we can change our ways. But the problems of other people are out of our boundary, which are beyond our sphere. Moreover, it may not just one person who might cause problems around us. If we are burdened with all these problems around us, we are never free from problems. We will always have problems.

So, we must aware that it is a problem of the person who put a stumbling block.

It is not that Jesus doesn't understand the situation. He clearly says, "Woe to that person through whom they [or problems] come."

God doesn't leave the person who hindered our walk of faith. Here Jesus says something very strict, "It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck."

Romans 12:19

¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

If we try to take revenge by ourselves, we will end up doing evil ourselves in turn. Do not seek revenge; instead, allow God's wrath to make sure justice is served. Trust Him and turn it over to Him.

We must remember that we can cast all our anxiety on him because he cares for us. (1 Peter 5:7) We take refuge in Jesus in troubled times. We bring our wounded heart, our tiredness to Jesus. We ask him to embrace us, rest us and heal us. We share with Jesus our anger, our disappointment, and our desire to get even. We hand all these feelings to Jesus and leave these to His righteous judgment.

3-4

³ So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴ If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

In short, it says "Don't put a stumbling block. Help those who felt down to rise and move forward his journey with Jesus."

We can see more details in Matthew about how to deal with a person who sinned.

Matthew 18:15-20

¹⁵ "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶ But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. ¹⁸ "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three

come together in my name, there am I with them."

First, we should talk to the person privately. Then, if it doesn't work we should bring along one or two trustworthy friends to talk to the person. In any way, the purpose is not to judge the person nor call him evil nor get even with him, but to take the person out of sin and bring him back to the truth.

James 5:19-20

¹⁹ My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, ²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

The purpose is to bring the person back to the brotherly relationship in the Lord, where we respect and accept one another, and work together for the kingdom of God.

In this way, we can cover over the sin and prevent it from spreading. We can remove stumbling blocks.

We need to be careful when we use email. If we find someone did something wrong or wonder why he or she did like that, we should better just email the person directly. It is against this principle to CC everyone carelessly. Or even worse is to post it on facebook or twitter. In most cases, people who do things like that don't do it for reconciliation, but their real motive is anger and hatred against the person and they actually want to argue the person down. If you do that, that will only hinder the person from recovering. Now you put a stumbling block.

After talking with the person, if the person doesn't listen, we might deal with the matter, not as personal problem, but as church problem. We should prevent the evil from spreading in the church.

2. Humble servants

Jesus told his disciples that it was impossible that no offenses or stumbling blocks should come. He also told them to relate to their brother who sinned so that he can recover. He said to them, "Even if a person sins against you seven

times in a day, if he comes back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

Luke continues to record the conversation between Jesus and apostles.

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⁵ The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

Apostles felt that without having their faith increased, there is no way for them to forgive others' sins, let alone forgive those who made them stumble, and not just once, but many times. And they expressed what they felt frankly with Jesus.

When we realize how weak our faith is, I think it is not easy, but quite difficult to admit it honestly and seek the Lord's help. Those disciples are chosen as apostles. If they admit their faith is weak, what would others think? If they worry about their face and position, they would never admit that.

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⁶ 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.

Jesus' answer teaches us the following; The faith is not a matter of much or little, nor big or small, but it is a matter of having faith or not, and using it or not.

Even if we have a lot of big faith, if we don't use it, it is as good as not having faith. Even if we only have a little small faith, if we use it, God can work. The important thing is not us who have faith, but what God is like, in whom we have faith.

7-10

⁷ "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'? ⁸ 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'? ⁹ Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? ¹⁰ 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.' "

What does a master expect his servant to do? Is it an unreasonable demand? Or is it something ordinary? It is something ordinary, something the servant can do and should do daily.

The master knows what kind of works the servant has been doing. He knows that he can cook and he can serve. And he knows the servant also needs to eat and rest.

In this scene, the servant was not forced to do something he has no ability to do. The master expects the servant to do what he can do and what he should do.

This shows our relationship with God. God created us. He knows very well what we can do and what we can't. He will never demand us to do something unreasonable which we have no ability to do. And he expects us to do what we ought to do as people of His kingdom, royal priesthood, made in the image of God.

"Unworthy servants" doesn't mean useless, unnecessary burden for the master. This is a humble and unpretentious expression before the Lord.

Humility is to accept "oneself" as God says "you are". It is not what others say "you are", nor how we see ourselves. We must see and know ourselves as God sees us, and accept ourselves.

God made us in His image. We are redeemed by the cross, by Jesus Christ, and our relationship with God was recovered. God speaks to each one of us, "You are precious in my eyes. I love you." That is us, you and me.

God knows us, loves us and respects us. And he entrusts us to do what we ought to do as His kingdom people. We must accept it humbly and practice it with appreciation. Then our faith in the Lord will become living faith.

3. Go and show yourself

11-13

¹¹ Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

Ten men who had leprosy met Jesus. They asked for his mercy. But they didn't come near him, but stood at a distance and called out in loud voice. Lepers are considered unclean. They themselves also considered they were unclean. (Luke 5:12) They should live far away from the ordinary people. (Levi 13:46)

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¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

Here Jesus didn't come close to them, didn't touch them. He just said a word. And "as they went, they were cleansed." That is, when they heard Jesus' word, nothing happened to them yet. They still had leprosy.

If you were one of these ten, what would you think? Let's imagine you are in that situation.

"You have leprosy, and have no hope to be cleaned. You will have to live separated from your family for the rest of your life. Then you heard that Jesus healed some lepers. But you don't know how you can meet him, and even if you can meet him, will he heal you? Is he really able to heal?" That's you, okay?

One day, a stranger came near your village. You heard someone said "That is Jesus." You run out to the street with other lepers. You saw him in the distance. You called out with all your might, "Jesus! Have pity on us!"

You are excited with mixed-feelings of expectation and anxiety. "Will he notice us, come near us, touch us and heal us, saying, 'I am willing. Be clean'?"

But, Jesus totally fell short of your expectation. He stood at a distance, he didn't move an inch. And he just said a word, "Go, show yourselves to the priests."

"Show to the priests? Show what? Show this contaminated body with leprosy?"

The Bible doesn't tell us how they were feeling as they left the place. It just says dispassionately "As they went, they were cleansed". From verse 17, we can see all ten were cleansed as they went. What they did is just what they were told to do.

Faith as small as a mustard seed. It is okay if our faith is not big, not excellent, strong nor great.

Do you remember about Simon Peter? He heard what Jesus told him to do, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Peter said, "Because you say so, I will do that." Probably Peter wasn't that sure, but hearing Jesus' word, he let down the nets. He just did what he was told to do. And amazingly he got a large number of fish. Through the faith as small as a mustard seed, he experienced how great Jesus was.

The ten men who had leprosy heard Jesus say "Go", and they went. They just did what they were told to do. They just did what they could and should do. However, through the faith as small as a mustard seed, Jesus did a great miracle.

15-19

¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him -- and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

One of them, when he realized he was healed, came back all the way to see Jesus. And he threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him.

He knew for sure that he was completely healed of leprosy. He knew he was cleansed, and no longer need to keep distance from others. He can come close to others as he wishes.

And he also knew that if he comes close to Jesus, he would not avoid him, but will welcome him. Until that time, people used to be afraid of him coming close to them. They avoid him and openly show their disgust of coming close to him. But now, he was sure that Jesus would accept him as he was. There was no reason for him to be hesitant to come close to Jesus.

And he knew for sure that this healing was the work of God. Jesus called him "this foreigner". But he knew that God is not just a god of Israel, but He is also his God. And God will accept his praise and worship.

The important thing is that he not only knew and had confidence in these facts, but he acted on his belief. He came close to Jesus and threw himself at Jesus' feet. He praised God with all his might.

If we ask him why he did so, he might say, "Well, I just did what I ought to do as I encountered Almighty God."

Today, we studied about "Faith as small as a mustard seed".

Faith is not a matter of "much or little", nor a matter of "big or small". It is a matter of "having it or not", and a matter of "using it or not". The important thing for faith is what God is like in whom we have faith.

We must listen to and respond to God, who made us, knows us and loves us. And we must do what we are entrusted to do. And then, our faith in the Lord will become a living faith. We will experience the Life and our lives will be changed. We can shine as we are.