**Four Hallmarks of Humility**

October 18, 2015

Luke 17:1-10

Key verse 17:10 “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.’”

Pride is the dominant force in sin. Pride was the sin that got Satan thrown out of heaven. Pride was the sin that got Adam and Eve thrown out of the Garden of Eden. That is why the Bible always talks about humbling ourselves. Humility is one of the greatest virtues that a Christian should have. 1 Peter 5:5 says, “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud and but shows favor to the humble.” Jesus is the greatest example; even though he is God, he humbled himself and came down to this world as a baby in a manger to live among us. Today’s passage defines the essence of humility. The word does not appear in any form, but it is the theme. There are four hallmarks of humility. First, humble people do not cause others to stumble. Second, humble people are ready to forgive. Third, humble people admit their weakness. Fourth, humble people have the attitude of unworthy servants.

**First**, humble people do not cause others to stumble. Look at verses 1-3a. “Jesus said to his disciples, “Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. So watch yourselves.” Can you imagine being on a boat in the deep ocean and somebody throws a rope around your neck? The other end is tied to rock heavier than your car, and it is tossed overboard. Imagine your feelings as you watch the rope disappearing into the water, coil by coil. Suddenly, the rope pulls and you are yanked with terrible force into the icy waters. Horrible! I don’t want that to happen to me! If that is better, what punishment could be worse? Yes there is a worse punishment than the one just described. In the previous passage we learned about hell. Hell is very real. Suffering in the flames of hell, the rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus with a drop of water to cool his tongue, but Abraham said that he could not. The rich man was stuck in the anguish of hell, with no way out. That is worse than being thrown in the water with a millstone tied around your neck. Jesus says, “You would be better off drowned now on the spot instantly than making one of the little ones stumble.” Here “one of the little ones” refer not children, but spiritually young Christians. They are little ones in terms of their spiritual development. Jesus is very protective of his little ones.

Jesus says, “Watch yourselves.” This is warning to a life of humility that begins with never doing anything to cause another believer to stumble. But Jesus admits that we are living in a fallen world. He said, “Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come.” We live in a corrupt world. We live in an imperfect world. We make others stumble intentionally and unintentionally.

And yet, people hardly give a thought to how their actions influence others. They tempt others into promiscuity because they want to please themselves. Or they use peer pressure so they can have company in their sin. Tempting others puts us in the role of the devil. It is especially bad to tempt young Christians because they are easy to be led astray. We should be humble enough to watch ourselves whether we are causing others to stumble.

How do we cause others to stumble? Firstly, by our hypocrisy. Even though we say that the kingdom of God is our hope, we indulge in materialism, and thus cause others, especially our children to live for money through our actions. Secondly, by our false teaching. The Pharisees blatantly taught that Jesus is not the Messiah, and thus led people astray. We may not be so blatant, but we may teach a wrong theology such as salvation by our works or teach something that hinders true spiritual growth in young Christians. We may lead others to false understanding of God and Christ, and false understandings of how we are to live our Christian lives. Thirdly, we cause others to stumble by abusing our rights. 1 Corinthians 8:9,12 says, “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak…When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.” Humble people consider others out of love so that they do not live in an offensive way. When Steve Stasinos in Chicago UBF first came to worship service, he had long hair, a heavy metal t-shirt, and chains hanging from his pants. But Sarah Barry said, “I like your hair style. It looks like Jesus’ hairstyle.” She did not try to correct him but accepted him. If she told him to cut his hair, he would not have come back.

**Second**, humble people are ready to forgive. Look at verses 3b-4. “If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them, and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day, and seven times come back to you and say, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.” In the first part we thought about how important it is not to do things that cause others to sin. From verse 3, we can make a stronger statement: Not only don’t do things that make people sin, but actively do things that help them repent by rebuking them. What does that mean? We really want to know what it means to rebuke, because some people do not know. Instead they get angry and yell at someone, “Look what you did!” That is not a rebuke; that is a tirade. What is the difference between a rebuke and an insult? To begin with, rebukes are usually not yelled. Rebukes are not done in anger, but in love. But the fundamental difference between a rebuke and an insult is the purpose. An insult is meant to hurt and make the person feel bad. Usually we do it to get even. But we rebuke to help a person to repent, and when they repent, we forgive them. Rebukes are in love because you, the rebuker, are ready with open arms to forgive the rebukee. If you are not ready to forgive, you are not ready to rebuke. You rebuke someone only to help them to overcome sin. We need great wisdom to rebuke others. 2 Timothy 4:2 tells us, “correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.” Rebukes must be done with great patience and careful instruction. If the rebuker must be careful that they are rebuking in love, the rebukee must be even more careful to humbly accept the rebuke. (Pr 9:8)

Forgiving others is hard because we have been hurt, and even when the wounds heal, there can be scars. People say, “I’ll never forgive you for what you did!” But that is a very dangerous thing to say. Because Jesus has said, “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Mt 6:14-15) When we do not forgive others, it hinders the Heavenly Father from forgiving our sins, too. We recite the Lord’s Prayer every Sunday: “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” So every Sunday, we are praying to be forgiven by God in the same way that we forgive others. Maybe you have bitterness and unforgiveness in your heart. But if you do not forgive, you are saying “Do not forgive us our sins as we do not forgive those who sin against us.” Humble people are ready to forgive, even those who repeatedly again and again sin against them. They are merciful, gracious and forgiving. And in the first place, while they will not purposely lead someone into sin, they are eager to lead someone out of sin.

**Third**, humble people admit their weakness. Now, when the disciple heard Jesus say, “seven times,” they thought, “Seven times! That’s too much!” So what did they say? Look at verse 5. “The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’” They thought, “I don’t have enough faith to forgive a man seven times. I’ve got like four-time faith. I can forgive a man four times, but not seven times. I need a faith boost, some kind of energy power-up, to get a faith that forgives seven times.” The disciples are very honest. They are humble enough to say, “This is beyond us, this isn't natural, this isn't what we've been taught.” How in the world are we going to live such lives? How are we going to exist in such a high standard? How is that possible? How can we live a life that doesn't cause people to stumble at all? How can we be so generous and forgiving when harmed? How can we live that way? Humble people live with a sense of their own inadequacy. When we come to God acknowledging our weakness, God empowers you to do the impossible. St. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:10, “When I am weak, I am strong.”

Look at verse 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 says that they do not need more faith; they just need a little bit of actual, genuine faith. A mustard seed is smaller than the head of a pin. But did you know that that tiny amount of faith is powerful enough to uproot a mulberry tree, and plant it in the sea? It is not a question of getting more faith but of using the faith we have. It is our own pride that prevents us from forgiving our brothers. That pride needs to be uprooted and cast out in the sea. When we trust in God, God can do the impossible.

**Fourth**, humble people have the attitude of unworthy servants. Look at verses 7-10. “Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? Won’t he rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? Will 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.’” What do you think when you read that? I think, “That guy has a bad job. If I had a boss who was that mean, I would quit my job.” After a hard day’s work, I expect to get some rest. I don’t expect to cook someone else’s food and wait on them while they eat, and then I get to eat the leftovers. No, I would quit. We think this way because we look for honor and recognition. We expect to be treated like we are worthy: “Where is my ‘Thank You?’” “I am worthy! I should be recognized.”

We should realize that when we serve God, we serve him in an inferior way. Humble people never imagine that they have served God so well as to somehow have impressed him and obligated him to give them some special honor, as if he is in their debt. It is nonsense. We were not chosen because we are special, but because of God’s grace. We also know that God does not need anyone to do him a favor. Rather he has done us the favor, in calling us to his service. He can do the work better by himself, but he has graciously given us a part in his redemption work. It is a privilege to serve God’s work. So we, knowing how unqualified we are for the work given to us, can only say, “Thank you, God, for using us. We are unworthy servants.” The best example of this attitude is St. Paul. He said in 1 Corinthians 15:9, “For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” He was an unworthy servant. If Jesus had not stopped him, he would have gone on killing, and one day ended up in hell. So what did he say in the next verse? “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” In his unworthiness, he worked harder than anyone else. This is the attitude of the unworthy servant.

We have forgotten that we are unworthy servants. We begin to look for recognition and complain when we are not thanked. We begin to compare to others and to boast. This is the challenge of verse 10: to do our full duty, and yet to remember that we are unworthy servants who have not done anything more than what is expected. We have done nothing special that God should thank us for it. We have been saved by grace and not by our works. This prevents us from boasting. Rather, we are the ones who must thank God for giving meaning and purpose to our tragic and empty lives through giving us duties to perform. We are unworthy servants who are privileged to have a mission from God. Let us serve God humbly, as we do our duty to lead others to repentance and forgiveness. When you humble yourselves like this, then one day God will exalt you and the Lord will seat you at his table and serve you.

May God bless you to grow in humility; humble enough to watch ourselves not to lead anyone into error or sin; humble enough so as to always forgive those who sin against us no matter how many times; humble enough so as to be aware always of our own weakness and have a growing dependency on the power of God; humble enough so as always to recognize that even our best service falls far short and we are unworthy servants who have only done what should be done.