

Luke 17 • Wrong Spiritual States

Introduction

How do things end up so wrong? In business circles, at the end of large projects, they often undertake a “post mortem”, a very frank discussion among all the project participants of the root causes of problems which they might possibly fix in order not to repeat them in the course of future projects. Hindsight being 20-20 and all, when Christ returns, those not ready will have to face the consequences of the root causes of their unfaithfulness with no opportunity to correct it. Instead, Jesus here provides the answers in advance such that if they’re followed, one will not find themselves living in the wrong spiritual state and about to be permanently separated from God forever. Adherence to His Word and ways in advance will provide success rather than justification for judgment exposing regret for one’s disobedience.

¹He said to His disciples, “It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come!

²It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.

³Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

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

⁶And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and be planted in the sea’; and it would obey you.

[Read v. 1-6]

FYI: The Greek word for “stumbling blocks” originally referred to the stick that tripped a snare or a trap. It’s not describing someone accidentally tripping, but the way that sin works, designed to trap and ensnare us.

Q: So the premise established at the outset is that at some point, it’s inevitable that sin will entrap or snare us. What is the greater warning than merely to watch out for such traps?

A: “...but woe to him through whom they come!” It’s difficult enough because these things inevitably come because of sin’s working in the world, but they’re not to come from us. We will have to deal with our own sin without compounding it further by allowing ourselves to in turn entangle and trap others through our own unaddressed sin.

Q: So what is the specific example provided to describe the most likely way that we become a stumbling block to others?

A: By withholding forgiveness from the repentant.

Q: Are we talking about general forgiveness of all sin?

A: What is specifically addressed here is “if he sins against you”. This is really an application of loving others according to the intent of God’s Law.

Q: We often focus on the teaching herein that we’re not to place a limit on our forgiveness. But what other requirement is demanded of us at the outset?

A: “If your brother sins, rebuke him”.

Point: We are just as responsible for initiating the process by holding others accountable as we are for completing the healing process when they repent of their ways. They are demands equally placed upon us by Christ in how we should “love” one another.

Q: If this is the case, why don’t the apostles ask, “Increase our love” instead of “Increase our faith”?

A: Forgiveness comes from faith in God’s Word, the confidence that He will work all things for good as long as we live according to His Word and ways. Especially when having to forgive someone of repeating an offense again, we must obey God’s Word by faith to see the process through. Love will be a by-product of biblical forgiveness properly applied.

Q: And how does Christ provide the certainty of what was just stated as to the need for faith rather than love?

A: He confirms it by the teaching of “faith like a mustard seed”.

Q: Is this teaching limited to just the fact that it's a very small seed, meaning that either you have faith or you don't?

A: No, there are a couple of additional layers of meaning:

1. A seed grows. It's an expression of something in a transitional state going from seed form to newly sprouted and eventually to full-grown. It's something that is growing and can be applied in greater strength as it takes root and grows into full maturity, something to be applied along the way during every stage of growth.
2. It's a common, easily obtainable seed. These were very, very common and not something special, hard to acquire, or expensive. It's an expression of how their fears that this is an impossible task are unfounded.
3. It's a miraculous power from God. Faith in God's Word results in the ability to effect forgiveness where it would be humanly impossible, as impossible as a single word uprooting and transplanting a tree.

Q: So what is the wrong, overall spiritual state being described?

A: The unforgiving.

Point: Just as our own relationship with Christ began with an act of forgiveness, so should our own attitude and relationships be based when it comes to others. All spiritual problems can be traced back to either an issue with one's personal repentance because of sin, or in dealing with the forgiveness of others because of sin.

⁷“Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come immediately and sit down to eat’? ⁸But will he not say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink’? ⁹He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? ¹⁰So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’”

[Read v.7-10]

Q: This is not simply a random sermon inserted by Luke by chance. How is this an extension of the need to exercise faith in the course of addressing each other's sin?

A: Christ places the need to exercise the miraculous faith of v.6 with the balance of everyday, ordinary service. Rebuking and forgiving are accomplished only through God's power, but they're **EXPECTED** of His servants as part of their entry-level job description. It's what a “normal” Christian does.

Q: What ministry pitfall is Jesus addressing?

A: There are those who believe their ministry/service is deserving of something special, of additional payment above and beyond.

Q: What is another way to translate the word “unworthy” as used in v.10?

A: It could also be translated “without need”. Christ has already supplied our needs and we therefore neither require nor **NEED** anything additional.

Point: Christ promises additional rewards in eternity which come from His grace. He does not “owe” them to us because the most we could ever hope to accomplish is simply our duty.

Q: What is the wrong, overall spiritual state being described?

A: The unpaid.

Point: There are those who believe they are due more for their efforts, usually demanding such things in **THIS** life rather than the next. Spiritual problems – especially spiritual deception – are often traced to someone's desire more for the things of this life than doing the work necessary to obtain them in the next.

¹¹While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; ¹³and they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

¹⁴When He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they were going, they were cleansed.

¹⁵Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, ¹⁶and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? ¹⁸Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?” ¹⁹And He said to him, “Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.”

[Read v.11-19]

Q: What is significant about the way the lepers addressed Jesus?

A: They called Him “Master”, the English translation for “Rabbi”. It was an acknowledgment of someone who taught and ministered according to God’s Word.

Q: How did Jesus show Himself to be a good rabbi?

A: By telling them to go show themselves to the priests in accordance with the Law (Leviticus 13-14) for those whom God heals of leprosy.

Q: How did Jesus show Himself to be more than just a rabbi?

A: By giving them an opportunity of faith by which to be healed. They had to begin their journey to see the priest as unhealed lepers, believing that they would be able to fulfill God’s Word upon coming into the presence of the priest, healed of their disease.

Point: *According to the way the people were taught in Jesus’ day, He was showing Himself to be much more than a prophet or simple rabbi. The fact they took Him at His word probably testifies that they knew Him to be something greater.*

Q: What did the one, returning Samaritan obtain that the others did not?

A: All were healed of their physical ailment, but only the one was healed of his greater spiritual ailment.

Q: Why does Jesus say, “your faith has made you well”? Doesn’t that mean that the others weren’t healed?

A: Another way to translate Jesus’ statement is, “Your faith has saved you”. In other words, they were all healed physically, but only one was healed spiritually. By acknowledging Christ from the heart, the Samaritan experienced the greater blessings of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Point: *Physical healing is a great blessing, but everyone still experiences death. (Even Lazarus, raised from the dead temporarily, eventually died.) However, the blessing of eternal life lasts forever.*

Q: What is the wrong, spiritual state being described here?

A: The ungrateful.

Point: *There are those who squander their opportunities in an effort to make life better in this life, to get what they can for themselves rather than worship the Author and Perfector of our faith. They are like the Prodigal Son, desiring to spend their inheritance in the here and now.*

²⁰Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; ²¹nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.”

²²And He said to the disciples, “The days will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. ²³They will say to you, ‘Look there! Look here!’ Do not go away, and do not run after them. ²⁴For just like the lightning, when it flashes out of one part of the sky, shines to the other part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in His day. ²⁵But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

²⁶“And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: ²⁷they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

²⁸“It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; ²⁹but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. ³⁰It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.

³¹“On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and likewise the one who is in the field must not turn back. ³²Remember Lot’s wife. ³³Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

³⁴“I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left. ³⁵There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken and the other will be left. ³⁶[Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left.]”

³⁷And answering they said to Him, “Where, Lord?”

And He said to them, “Where the body is, there also the vultures will be gathered.”

[Read v.20-37]

Q: What is the context of these verses as established by v.20-21? What is clearly being described?

A: This is about final judgment. The Pharisees clung to the false belief that the kingdom of God would come in the company of great signs and wonders, like a big bang. Christ refutes that by stating, “For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst”. In other words, embracing Christ as Savior **NOW** and putting His Word into practice **NOW** is how to **IMMEDIATELY** experience the kingdom of God.

Point: Many people are not prepared for Jesus’ Second Coming because they mistakenly believe that at the point of His coming everything will change, when in reality it is the point at which it’s too late to personally change and entrance is then impossible. The kingdom of God begins with accepting Christ and living according to His Word and ways in **THIS** life, which extends through His Second Coming into the Millennial Reign and into the next life for all eternity.

Q: What are the 3 examples Jesus gives of people who will miss out not only on being part of God’s Kingdom, but taken by surprise at His return?

1. First there are those embracing false Christs. Having rejected Him in their belief that He didn’t fulfill the qualifications of the Messiah according to their own expectations, they curse those who do.
2. Second, there are those who are so consumed with the things of this world that they are oblivious to anything else.
3. Third, there are those who are so engaged in the pursuit of sin that they are oblivious to the consequences of their actions much less any spiritual signs about them.

These conditions aren’t limited to non-believers, but to those who would purport to believe in God and yet either do not live according to His Word, or embrace a false, replacement Gospel.

Q: Why is this probably not describing the event so many describe as “the Rapture”?

A: How would anyone have time to run back into their house to get something or to even run in the opposite direction of the things they see if this was the Rapture? Also, the examples of Noah and Lot cited by Jesus are men who lived just before great judgments of God fell. It’s far more likely that this is referring to Christ’s return to earth to set up His righteous kingdom. But the greater point is whether one is spiritually prepared when He returns.

Q: Why might it be significant when Jesus specifies in v.34 that these things will take place “on that night”?

A: The repeated teaching throughout Scripture is not only does no one know the time of Christ’s return, but that it will come when least expected. The metaphor of the night is used throughout Scripture as a warning of this.

Q: What is the wrong, spiritual state being described here?

A: The unprepared.

Overall Application

How does someone arrive at the wrong spiritual state of being unprepared for Christ's return?

- 1. They are unforgiving to begin with, either in terms of their personal sin, addressing the sins of others, or both.*
- 2. They see themselves as unpaid, someone who deserves more out of **THIS** life.*
- 3. They are ungrateful, desiring personal blessings without feeling the need to render proper worship and gratitude in return.*

To what degree do these things betray areas you need to personally address in order to be properly prepared for Christ's return? How are they an expression of the quality of one's faithfulness? How are they all expressions of self-centeredness and a lack of love for others?