

Faith and Vigilance

The Lukan Journey Narrative 6

Luke 17:1 And he said to his disciples, “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!

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

3 Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,

4 and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

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

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

7 “Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’?

8 Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’?

9 Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded?

10 So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’ ”

11 On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.

12 And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance

13 and lifted up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

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

15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice;

16 and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan.

17 Then Jesus answered, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?

18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”

19 And **he said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”**

- ²⁰ Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed,
- ²¹ nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”
- ²² And he said to the disciples, “The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.
- ²³ And they will say to you, ‘Look, there!’ or ‘Look, here!’ Do not go out or follow them.
- ²⁴ For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day.
- ²⁵ But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.
- ²⁶ Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.
- ²⁷ They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.
- ²⁸ Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building,
- ²⁹ but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—
- ³⁰ so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.
- ³¹ On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back.
- ³² Remember Lot’s wife.
- ³³ Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.
- ³⁴ I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left.
- ³⁵ There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left.”
- ³⁶ *Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left*
- ³⁷ *And they said to him, “Where, Lord?” He said to them, “Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.”*

18:1 And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.
2 He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.
3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.'
4 For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man,
5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.' "
6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says.
7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?
8 **I tell you**, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find **faith on earth**?"

(Luke 17:1-18:8)

Faith Confusion

Faith. It's that **great doctrine of the Reformation** that turned the entire world on its head. It isn't that the medieval church denied faith or the need for it, but rather that they usurped faith's priority, putting human before it. This in turn generated untold numbers of people who either grew far too proud of themselves and how they earned God's favor by how great they were or became despondent, knowing their sinfulness and how far they fell short, but thinking

that the only way God would ever love them was if they did something to earn it.

Faith itself has been the object of **much misunderstanding** and abuse. It has been popular, for instance, to say that the Apostle Paul basically made up the doctrine, that Jesus has little to none of it. We've seen throughout Luke's Gospel how absurd this claim is and we will see throughout today's study just how central your need for faith is to the Lord. Then there are those who view faith as literally the only thing that God would even have in a Christian's life. Works? Why, they have no place at all, because any works in any sense must destroy salvation by faith alone. Therefore, go and sin all you want so that grace will increase. And, of course, as we've seen, there are those who just can't have faith first and works follow, because God will only save us *after* we've done all we can do to help ourselves.

People have long **pit Paul against James**. Paul says, “**Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?**” (**Gal 3:2**), while James says, “**Faith apart from works is useless**” (**James 2:20**). Again, Paul says, “**We hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law**” (**Rom 3:28**). Meanwhile James says, “**You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone**” (**James 2:24**).

Hopelessly contradictory, some say. Typical of the Bible. Others say, “Paul is right; James is wrong.” Or the reverse, “James is right; Paul is wrong.” And people undo the teaching of both as they can’t figure out any other way to reconcile these friends.

Luke 17:1-18:8. Structure and Context.

Luke 17:1-18:8 is the sixth of the seven lengthy units of Jesus Journey to Jerusalem (9:51-19:27). We’ve seen that these seven units are pairs with a central unit that dealt with the need for repentance in order to enter the kingdom of God. This sixth unit parallels the second unit (10:38-11:54). That unit began, curiously enough, with Jesus going to the house of Mary and Martha. Why is that curious? Because the very last words we’ve seen were a story about Lazarus, a man who happens to be Mary and Martha’s brother (16:19-31).

Let’s look briefly at how the two units pair up. In doing this, it will help us see that they are important to think about together for a good interpretation. Luke 10:38-11:54 dealt with the “persistent pursuit of God and Jesus Christ mandated according to the Gospel standards of Jesus’ life and

teaching.” The exact same summary can be said of our passage today.¹ In the earlier unit, the disciples ask Jesus, “Teach us to pray” (11:1). In this one, they ask, “Increase our faith” (17:5). In the former, Jesus’ exorcisms visibly show that the kingdom of God has come (11:20). In this one, it is change from within a person that visibly shows that the kingdom of God has come (17:21; etc.). The earlier unit had six woes pronounced against the Pharisees and teachers of the law (11:37-54). This one has one woe warning the disciples against causing others to stumble through false teaching (17:1). The earlier unit gave a parable of a friend asking for bread in the middle of the night (11:5-13). This one has a parable of a woman asking a judge for legal protection (18:1-8). Both are in the context of persistent prayer which overcomes when the initial response is “don’t bother me” (11:7) or simply refusal (18:4). The former section ends ominously with the Pharisees and scribes fiercely opposing Jesus (11:53-54). This one ends ominously, but with Jesus asking, “Will the Son of Man find faith when he comes?” (18:8).

The two stories that end the halves of the first section are negative and are aimed at the religious elites. Mean-

¹ These are the words of Buckwalter (69). This summary is taken from pp. 69, 72-74.

while, the two stories that end the present passage are **positive**, and are aimed at the marginalized people—a leprous Samaritan and a widow. Each unit stresses Jesus’ **supernatural power and sovereignty over Satan and false messiahs**. In the earlier one, Jesus visibly over-powers Satan as he exorcises power over the strong man (**11:21-22**). In the latter one, anyone who makes a claim to be the messiah must be ignored because Jesus’ coming will be visible to all eyes like lightning flashing across the sky (**17:23-24**). In the former, we are to pray, “**Let your kingdom come**” (**11:2**). In this one, the Pharisees ask Jesus **when the kingdom of God is coming** (**17:20-21**). In the earlier unit, Jesus changes a person from within by **exorcism**. In this one, it comes through **faith**. Both are divine confirmation that the kingdom of God has in fact truly come. Each depicts a person devoted to Christ sitting at **his feet** (**10:39; 17:15-16**), while he also has words for those he has healed but are **too preoccupied** to do the same (**10:41-42; 17:17-18**). As you can see, the units are woven together and are meant to be read with each other in mind.

As for our sixth unit by itself, it consists of **four main sections** that parallel one another in an A.B.A’.B’. form.

- A** **Four short teachings** on faithful service (17:1–10)
- the apostles tell Jesus (their only interaction with him in this point): “Increase our faith!”
- B** **HIGHLIGHT**: the importance of **faith and gratitude**—the miracle of Jesus cleansing the ten lepers (17:11–19)
- ends: “He said to him, ‘Rise up and go, your faith has made you well.’”
- A’** **One extended teaching** on showing vigilance in awaiting the coming of the Son of Man (17:20–37)
- the disciples ask Jesus (their only interaction with him in this point): “Where Lord?”
- B’** **HIGHLIGHT**: the importance of **persistent prayer**—the parable of the widow and judge (18:1–8)
- ends: “I say to you . . . when the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth?”

The first half begins with **four short teachings** on faithful service with the Apostles asking Jesus to **increase their faith** (11:5). The second half begins with **one long teaching** on how important it is to believe that the Son of Man is coming back with the disciples asking Jesus “**Where, Lord?**” (11:37). The first half ends with Jesus highlighting the importance of **faith and gratitude** in a story about healing ten **lepers**. The second half ends with Jesus highlighting the importance of **persistent prayer** in a story about the persistent **widow**.

Most importantly, **faith is found in all four sections**. In the first, second, and fourth, it is explicit. In the third, it is implicit. The first half ends with Jesus saying, “**Rise, and go**

your way; your faith has made you well” (17:19), and the second half ends in that question from Jesus, “*When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*” (18:8). In this way, the entire unit, like its match, it about **the need for faith**—faith in God, faith in his Son, faith in his teaching, faith in his healing, faith in his coming again. As we will see, it is a masterful teaching of **both** the idea of faith alone to justify a person and faith that necessarily works itself out in obedience to God. Paul and James are simply following their Master, Jesus, as they talk about two different problems that people have with understanding faith. Jesus will tackle them both here together.

A. Faith that Works (17:1-10)

We begin with **four short teachings** (Luke 17:1-10) on **faithful service to Jesus**. Serving Jesus is not optional for the Christian. It is obligatory. In them, we will see both Paul’s point and James’ point coming together in some very remarkable ways. The ESV has in these ten verses three headings, not four, but **vv. 1-4**, although certainly related, seem to be two distinct teachings.

It begins, “And he said to his disciples, ‘Temptations to sin are sure to come...’ (17:1a). Here, Jesus recognizes that we remain, even as disciples of Jesus, prone to wander, prone to sin. Jesus never teaches sinless perfectionism. We do not escape temptations in this life. We all may want to, but we cannot escape it. How interesting that the parallel in unit 2 is “Lead us not into temptation” (11:4).

Though it is a different Greek word (here it is *skandala*; there it was *peirasmos*) think about how the Lord’s prayer is telling us to pray that the Lord would not move us into places where we are tempted, but would provide a way out for us in light of what he says next here. “... but woe to the one through whom they come!” (1b). Curiously, James says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one” (James 1:13). God allows us to be tempted, but he does not tempt anyone. But in allowing it, he is not letting those who bring temptation to us off the hook.

I think a lot of people get so introverted about temptation and their fall into it that they don’t even stop to get righteously indignant about those through whom the temptation has come to them. But Jesus isn’t concerned here, at this moment, about *us* falling into sin (he dealt with that in

the parallel unit). He is concerned with *those who tempt others to fall into sin*. God hates this. His soul abhors it. He describes it as being “*better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin*” (2).

There’s a couple of things here to unpack. First, *who are these little ones?* There is a loose parallel here with **Matthew 18:6**, where it is clear that it is *physical children*. This child molesters or kidnappers or any evil villain in Disney (or those who work behind most Disney cameras, directing). But, as we will see, there are some pretty significant differences with Luke and Matthew, so much that people try to harmonize them when I wonder why Jesus can’t be saying similar things at different times? That said, there are no little children anywhere in the immediate context of Luke. Thus, it is tempting to think that perhaps he is talking about *any of his disciples*. After all, *Christians are called “children”* throughout the NT. So Jesus is very upset when someone tempts his own disciples to fall into sin.

Second, *who is fastening the millstone* and what is that anyway? In that world, you would use these huge millstones to grind flour. The millstone was incredibly big and heavy and was what either the person or animal with the help of a

lever pushed to grind the seeds. To have this put around your neck and thrown into the sea is an incredibly violent image if you just think about it for two seconds. Your entire body would be jerked ferociously from wherever you were standing, your neck would probably snap before it hit the water, and you would plunge very rapidly to the bottom with no hope of arising. It seems to me that the image could either be of someone else tying this rope to your neck or you doing it yourself.



Millstone, Nazareth Village, Israel

Then there's the whole **“sea” imagery**. The sea is a metaphor of both chaos and Sheol (or at least the entrance to it). Jesus has just talked about Hades, the Greek equivalent. So

it's kind of ironic that Jesus says it will be better for you if you have this happen to you than should God get ahold of you when you've done this to a little one. You could end up like the Rich Man—in torment.

But who is in mind? If it's the religious leaders, the equivalent today would be Christian pastors and leaders telling Christians that God doesn't care about sin. It's fine to cut off your privates and be who you want to be, to sleep around, to steal other people's stuff, to live however you want. God doesn't care about sin. "Sin" is a made up word by power-hungry tyrants who want to keep you down. As Romans 1 ends its laundry list of abominations, "They not only do them, but they approve of those who practice them" (Rom 1:32). "Churches" are full of this kind of garbage and Jesus tells you what it will be better for them to have this happen as they tempt the flock to sin from the holy pulpits they defile.

But what if, somehow, *we* become the source of temptation? Can we? Ryken says, "We do it when our complaining spirit causes other people to be discontent. We do it by speaking evil words that unfairly influence someone else's opinion. We do it by carrying on an argument to the point where we provoke an angry response. We do it by enticing someone to

commit sexual sin or join us for some juicy gossip. We do it by boasting of our accomplishments or acquisitions in a way that makes other people envious or boastful. These are only some of the many ways that we can become a spiritual hindrance to other people. Of course they have to take responsibility for their own actions. But woe to us if we make it easier for them to sin, or harder for them to be godly!”²

Thus, the Lord continues with **the second of the four teachings**. “**Pay attention to yourselves!**” (**Luke 17:3**). One of the first ways we can become heedless is when someone else has sinned against us and we hold it over them. Jesus says, “**If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him**” (4). This is a remarkable teaching.

Some people treat sins of others, indeed even things that aren’t sins but are simply things that make them mad or are an offense to the family or whatever, as, “**You are dead to me.**” A kind of **Godfather mafia mentality**. Utter *unforgiveness*, no matter what. You’ve committed the unpardon-

² Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 209.

able sin. How interesting that in the parallel, Jesus was casting out demons by Beelzebub and talked about the unforgivable sin, and Jesus talks there about how hard it is for us to forgive sin.³

Now, **Jesus upholds the law** by saying that if a brother sins, you are to *rebuke him*. This shortens the longer version in Matt 18, which is a long discussion about **church discipline** and the proper way to handle it. Too many people want someone else to deal with it. “**Pastor, so and so did this. Go and talk to them.**” No. Jesus says if you are sinned against, *you* deal with it, privately. You rebuke them.

But this really isn't Luke's main interest. The truly stunning thing here is that **your brother listens to you and repents!** In other words, it worked! It's exactly what you want to have happen. But some people in rebuking others are interested only in lording sin over their heads. They don't care if they repent or not. They were never interested in that as they rebuked, only in letting them know how evil they are.

What do you do if they actually repent and ask your forgiveness? You forgive him. But how many times? Jesus says “**seven times.**” But the eighth means I don't have to, right?

³ The parallel is technically in **12:10**, the third unit. However, the Beelzebub story is in the second unit (**11:15-19**), and it is here that Matthew and Mark talk about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (**Matt 12:31; Mark 3:29**).

No. In Matthew, Jesus says **seventy times seven** (**Matt 18:22**) to make the point of, “**You keep forgiving him.**” Luke makes the point in perhaps an even more striking way. Jesus says here that if your brother sins against you seven times *in a day* and **he asks forgiveness seven times in that day!** This is truly amazing. Why?

Many Christians are of the opinion that repentance means that you never sin again. Of course, it means you do not want to sin again, but we all do. They will rightly say that the word means “**to turn,**” which it does. Then they will say that if you are a follower of Christ and you have turned and repented, then you will not sin again. If you do, they will say, then you never actually repented. It was a lie. My opinion of this is that such people know not the depths of their own wickedness against God and think too highly of themselves. Pride is the greatest sin of all! But Jesus goes after this here. Imagine if you knew someone who did the same thing to you seven times in a single day and asked forgiveness for it each time. **Once? No problem.** I forgive you. **Twice? OK, maybe.** Three times? Most likely not. **Seven times? Absolutely no way** will I forgive you, because there’s no way you mean it. The fact that you keep doing the same thing proves it.

Now, you might say that Jesus doesn't specify that it's the same sin here. Maybe it's someone like Martin Luther who has **an overly active conscience** and thinks of seven *different* things he did that day. That makes it easier, right? But show me where Jesus allows you to have an "out" here in these words. Where does he specify that it isn't the same sin? What if it is the same sin? Do you think that Jesus' words do not apply to you in that case, that you are exempt? You don't have to obey the Lord?

I'm bringing this up to show you just how hard Jesus' teaching is. This seems wrong to us. And we do not want to do it. So, we find ways to get ourselves off the hook, pretending we do not have to obey all while saying we are obedient children.

Think about this with God. **You are prone, each of you, to various sins.** One person is prone to gossip. Another to lust. Another to anger. Seven times in the same day the same sin appears in your heart or life and you repent to God. What if God said, "**Once, OK. Twice? Maybe. Three times? Probably not. Seven times? Absolutely not. You clearly don't mean it.**" Is that grace? Is that good news? Is that a Gospel? What kind of double standard is that if Jesus is teaching the opposite here? This is a serious problem that many people

have. And they don't seem to be able to handle God's grace because of it.

Some think this makes a mockery of sin. No. Jesus never says here that the person wasn't sinning. **Some think this makes a mockery of repentance.** No. Jesus says temptations to sin are sure to come. He acknowledges that we are all sinners and that never goes away. The reality is, it is only the grace of God and learning to accept his grace in your own depraved life that allows you to be able to forgive this way and not make a mockery of sin or repentance. You know your own weaknesses and you know how you hate your sins. Why then not extend God's forgiveness to others?

The third teaching comes on the heels of this and I think you can read it two different ways. The disciples hear this and they say, **"Lord, 'Increase our faith'" (Luke 17:5).** **Faith shows itself for the first time today.** If you've heard what I just said, then you may understand why they say this. This is a hard teaching. The Apostles rightly acknowledge here that faith is a gift of God. Jesus must increase their faith. They can't do it themselves. They are good Calvinists.

But how does Jesus respond? He responds by saying, **"If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and**

it would obey you” (6). There are two ways of interpreting this. The first says that just the tiniest faith will be able to carry out this duty. In other words, God gives to each of his children the power to forgive. That’s Paul. The second takes it more cynically. “What is needed is not the *increase of faith, but the exercise of faith.*”⁴ In other words, maybe the disciples were using this as an excuse to not forgive! Jesus is saying you don’t need me to give you more faith, you need to listen to what I’m saying and do it. You already have the faith. Exercise it. That’s James.

What he says in the fourth teaching will reinforce this third, but there’s something else here to think about. Notice that he talks about the sea again. That’s twice now in this short text. First, a millstone tied to your neck launches you into the sea. Now, it is speaking to a Mulberry tree and it goes into the sea. What’s fascinating here is that the other Gospels have “this mountain” rather than a tree. So why the difference? Well, for one, Luke has Jesus down in the wilderness, so maybe there aren’t really any significant mountains to be looking at.

⁴ John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, vol. 35B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 838.

But the imagery of a tree is fascinating, because **trees often stand for nations and gods** in the OT (Nations: **Ezek 31, Dan 4**. Gods: **Deut 12:2, Ezek 31, Hos 14:8**). Both are relevant to the larger discussion of **the kingdom of God**. Perhaps in picking a tree that grows easily, has deep roots, provides food for the people, and shade—like a Mulberry tree—the idea is that Jesus is making a passing reference here to his kingdom uprooting the kingdom of men. What might be the meaning of this?



(Mulberry Tree [sykaminos]; Israel)

Well, it is the kingdoms of this world, **man's thoughts, Satan's thoughts, that will not extend forgiveness.** That kingdom is firmly entrenched in our minds such that it is not natural for us to even consider that what Jesus says here would even be possible, let alone a good thing. But if we speak out the word of truth about it, it is like taking that evil kingdom and throwing it into the sea. The what? The place of **chaos and Sheol.** In other words, it is temporary and fading away, just like man. It's final place is judgment. But the kingdom of God and God's ethics and values and laws last forever.⁵

The fourth teaching is the longest, seems unrelated, but I think is directly related. **“Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’”** (**Luke 17:7-10**). This is really quite stunning and I think gets at **the heart of a lack of forgiveness.**

⁵ The initial thought for this dealt with the nations. See **J. Duncan M. Derrett**, *Jesus Among Biblical Exegetes*, Studies in the New Testament Vol. 6 (Brill, New York, 1995): 28-41. It isn't difficult to add the “gods” to this, especially given the supernatural context of Luke.

We have a servant who is out in the field. **We might expect** Jesus to say that if he is out in the field all day that because he has worked so hard in the hot sun that when he comes in, tired and hungry, that the master would say, **“Please, sit down and I’ll make you something to eat.”** But he doesn’t do this. Why? Because he’s the master. Even more, we might expect him to say, **“When he comes in from all that work, you should thank him for what he’s done.”** But he doesn’t do this. Why? Because he’s the servant. Instead, because of your roles, you tell him that his work isn’t finished. Go and make me my meal and make sure you are dressed properly so we can end the day.

If this sounds **brutal**, it is. But that’s because Jesus is dealing here with **self-righteousness**. Who is the servant? We are. And what kind of servants are we? Unworthy servants who sin against God. Even when we don’t sin, even if we forgive, we are simply doing what we are commanded to do. We aren’t to get big heads about doing what we are supposed to do. But too many people pat themselves on the back when they simply carry out the law. In this way, Jesus is trying to knock the pride and self-righteousness out of his disciples, letting them know that just because they serve God, they are still servants, not masters. Don’t let obedience go to your head.

B. Faith that Worships (17:11-19)

The second half of this section is clearly related. The disciples have just asked Jesus to increase their faith. Then he told them about how their faith must have works and that God isn't going to give them merits for doing what they're supposed to do. Works are simply the fruit of faith. Now, he tells them a story about what faith is supposed to be like.

The setting comes first. “On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee” (Luke 17:11). The geography here is simply to let you know that Jesus is heading down to Jerusalem for his great trial. “And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers” (12a). The village is unimportant. What matters is that there are ten lepers, unclean pariahs and apparently like Lazarus—full of sores. Luke is the only one who tells us this story.

They “stood at a distance” (12b), like they were supposed to. Yet, they had clearly heard about Jesus for they “lifted up their voices, saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us’” (13). “When he saw them he said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went they were cleansed” (14). With just a word, they are healed. This is paralleled with the exorcism-Beelzebub story in unit 2. Exorcisms and healings, the two prongs of Jesus’ powerful ministry.

So why does Luke tell us this? Because of how the story ends. “Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan” (15-16). He sees what Jesus did for him. He turns back. “To turn.” He praises God openly and loudly. Turning, results in praising. He falls at Jesus’ feet and gives him thanks. And ... he was a Samaritan. We’ve seen that these people are as unwelcomed by Jews as lepers were. Jesus allows him to touch him. But not without making a comment.

“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” (17-18). Jesus points out that he is a Samaritan and that the others, apparently, were Jews. Who did the right thing? The one you wouldn’t expect. The final verse ends the section, “And he said to him, ‘Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well’” (19). How interesting. I thought Jesus made him well? Jesus says his faith made him well. Did the others have faith? If so, why didn’t they thank God? They were too concerned with their duty! They were obeying Jesus, just like we ended the last section. The subtlety is that their need to obey overtook their need to worship.

This story shows that true obedience begins not with duty, but **thankfulness**. Faith is being thankful to God, rejoicing in his kindness and mercy. It isn't only concerned with duty. This is precisely why **Paul** talks about faith the way that he does. There is a fine line between works righteousness and obedience that arises from faith—especially if your so-called faith is utterly oblivious to worship and thankfulness. In Romans 1, which we've already mentioned, the first and chief sin is a lack of thanks. “**They did not honor him as God or give him thanks**” (**Rom 1:21**). This thanklessness lead them into every manner of sin, ending in them approving of others who do the same things, which takes us full circle to **Luke 17:1**.

Do you see what Jesus has done? He has shown you that **faith is the key to the Christian life**. Our lives are not spent in disobedience as people filled with faith. We do not believe so that sin will increase. Rather, they are carried out in obedience—forgiving others even when it seems impossible. Not if they do not repent, but if they do and ask your forgiveness. But you do not forgive out of anger or begrudgingly out of duty. For you remember that you are God's servant and what he has done for you in not treating you like a slave, but as a son. You remember to give him thanks

in all things, for duty will come, but not before worship. That's how **faith is both alone and not alone**. That is how you are made well by faith and yet your faith allows you to go out and do what God has asked of you, his servant. This entire first half of our passage ends in faith and a great example from someone we do not expect. And it takes us straight into the second half of the unit.

A'. That that Perceives (17:20-37)

The **first half of the second part** of our passage is by far the longest. And, when compared to the other three sections, it **seems out of place**, because faith is not explicitly mentioned in it. Here, Jesus deals with the question of **the kingdom of God** and, what is for him (and maybe us), the future. It is a very difficult text to interpret, and we will spend time in a later sermon(s) looking at it in more detail. But today, my purpose is to read it in the context of the entire unit, something that is rarely done.

It begins with the Pharisees asking him a question, **“When [will] the kingdom of God come?”** (Luke 17:20). Now, this is not a question that is arising out of faith, because in the parallel, Jesus had already told them, **“if it is by**

the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20). Even as he was casting out demons in their midst and spoke so plainly as this, they could not perceive what he was talking about.

So he answers another way, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (20-21). Now, I grew up under a system called Dispensationalism and was taught things like, “We must distinguish between the ‘Kingdom of God’ and the ‘Kingdom of Heaven.’”⁶ They rightly said that, “The ‘Kingdom of God’ is the ‘Reign of God’ in the Universe over all His created creatures, and includes time and eternity, heaven and earth. It is **spiritual** and **‘cometh not with observation.’** Luke 17:20, 21. It is entered by the **‘New Birth,’** (John 3:5); and is **not ‘meat’ and ‘drink,’** but **‘Righteousness and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost.’** Rom. 14:17,”⁷ and it is thus here now. But they then denied that at the present time the kingdom of heaven is here, that Christ is King ruling from his throne (he is only acting as

⁶ Clarence Larkin, *Dispensational Truth, or “God’s Plan and Purpose in the Ages”* (Philadelphia, PA: Clarence Larkin, 1918), 73.

⁷ Ibid. Bold original.

high priest from the Father's throne),⁸ or that this present kingdom is anything other than spiritual. This is a difficult discussion and part of a larger even more difficult context, so we will look at it in more detail next time.

I bring this up now because I want to show that even though the larger discussion of the kingdom has met with different interpretations, **this particular saying is agreed upon**. Jesus said that the kingdom of God is already in the midst of you. It is here, now. But you can't see it. You can't drive to it. It isn't on a map somewhere, not even a secret map like the copper scroll found at the Dead Sea. The only way you can perceive it is *by faith*. Faith is implicit! It doesn't say that, but that's the necessary implication, since the Pharisees very clearly did not believe what Jesus had taught them previously. And since it isn't something you can put in a test tube or run scientific experiments on or analyze empirical data through a computer, it is something you must see only with the eyes of faith. But when you do, it is very clearly there, to anyone with eyes to see.⁹

At this moment, Jesus does something unexpected. He turns to his disciples and starts talking **about the future**.

⁸ 74.

⁹ For more on the kingdom next time: **Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum**, *TH293 Israelology: The Doctrine of Israel*, Logos Mobile Education (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).

“And he said to the disciples, ‘The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, ‘Look, there!’ or ‘Look, here!’ Do not go out or follow them” (22-23). The “Look, here ... there.” Clearly links back to what he just said about the kingdom. But now he is talking about “the days of the Son of Man.” These “days” seems to refer to his time on earth. In other words, in coming days, he will no longer be with them.

However, some will start to say, “Look here” or “Look there.” In other words, some will start to say that he has returned. And they will claim to either have seen him or be him. So suddenly, Jesus has taken us past his death to some time in their future, and maybe our own.

At this point, we start to get a lot of language that is found in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24. However, Luke does not have the setting of this teaching any-where near Jerusalem. Therefore, I believe he is giving a similar, *but not identical* teaching here. This will make more sense next time. So what does he say?

“For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this

generation” (24-25). First, he talks about his return, which is called “his day.” Then he talks about his suffering and death, which must come first.

Next, he gives two popular stories that are often used together: the Flood story and the Sodom story.

<i>Sirach</i> 16:7-10	<i>CD</i> 2:17-3:12	<i>3 Macc</i> 2:4-7	<i>m. Sanh.</i> 10:3	<i>Jubilees</i> 20:5	<i>T. Naph</i> 3:4-5	<i>Jude</i> 5-7	<i>2 Peter</i> 2:4-8
	Watchers						Watchers
Giants	Giants	Giants		Giants	Sodom	Generation of the Wilderness	
	Generation of the Flood		Generation of the Flood			Wilderness	Generation of the Flood
	Flood		Flood		Watchers	Watchers	Flood
	Sons of Noah		Generation of the Dispersion				
Sodom		Sodom	Sodom	Sodom		Sodom	Sodom
	Sons of Jacob						
Canaanites	Israel in Egypt	Pharaoh & Egyptians	Spies				
Generation of the Wilderness	Israel at Kadesh		Generation of the Wilderness				
			Company of Korah				

“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all— so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed” (26-30).

Every other time they appear together (except in the Mishna, no surprise), something unusual about the Flood story appears. Either **the watchers or the giants** (or both) are mentioned. At first glance, this would seem to be the exception. However, Jesus singles out “**marrying and given in marriage,**” which when you read the Genesis 6 account, was anything but normal marriages. This could signal that something very unusual will happen prior to Jesus’ return. However, the language Jesus uses seems to downplay the extraordinary in exchange for the mundane. Things are just going on as normal when suddenly, like lightning in the sky, Jesus returns. **We will look at both of these possibilities next time.**

The next section talks about, in many people’s view, **the Rapture**. “**On that day, let the one who is on the housetop,**

with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left." Two men will be in the field; one will be **taken** and the other left" (31-36). The Rapture is this idea that God will suddenly snatch Christians away to heaven, leaving unbelievers here during the Great Tribulation. Christians will then return seven years later (or three and a half or just a few months, depending on the view), when Jesus returns and ushers in the physical millennium from Jerusalem in a rebuilt temple. The Rapture is a uniquely Dispensational teaching.

But look carefully. While we do have the idea of one taken and another left behind, Luke goes into detail about one element of the Sodom story: **Lot's wife**. What happened to Lot's wife? She looked back and *immediately turned into a pillar of salt*. In other words, she **immediately died**. She was judged. Just like those who died in the Flood; just like those who died in Sodom and Gomorrah. In the Rapture, those left behind do not immediately die, but suffer through seven

horrible years of a Great Tribulation. They are not judged, and some are even thought to repent. Thus, it is better **not to see a Rapture** here so much as it is simply **the final judgment** at the Second Coming of Christ. But again, we will look at this more next time.

The final verse of this unit is **vs. 37**, “**And they said to him, ‘Where, Lord?’**” The disciples speaking here **corresponds** their one statement in the parallel A Unit, thus giving us a match. Their statement then was, “**Lord, increase our faith.**” Now they are asking to know where this will happen.

It’s a rather strange question, but Jesus answer is even stranger. He said to them, “**Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.**” This is a picture of **gruesome judgment and death** that accompanies the immediate rescue and salvation of his people. Thus, the last image reinforces that former. This is *not* about a Rapture. This is about **the end of all things** in the present age. Jesus is coming to judge the living and the dead. If the former statement was about faith, so also is this one. Jesus is telling them that they must believe what he is saying, for these things you will not believe unless you have faith. At least, you won’t believe them until they happen to you. Then you will believe, but it will be too late.

B'. Faith that Prays and Perseveres (18:1-8)

The final unit parallels the healing of the ten lepers. In that one, we saw lepers, in this one we have a woman. That story was about faith that worships God. This one is about faith that prays and perseveres. Coming on the heels of Jesus' teaching about his return in the future, it makes very good sense. If we must perceive his kingdom and coming only by faith, then we ought always to pray that he would allow us to see what is otherwise hidden. We must always pray and never give up, especially when it feels like he has forgotten. In talking about prayer like this, he is also harkening back to the Lord's Prayer in the earlier section where he taught us to pray that his kingdom would come.

Here is the story. “And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 8:1). This tells you the point right at the start. Then he tells a parable to reinforce it. “He said, ‘In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man’ (2). Sounds pretty much like most of our judges and courts in our country today. There's nothing new under the sun.

“And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’”

For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming’” (3-5). I love how he says that she will “beat him down” by her continually coming. The story reminds us of the parallel of the friend who is bothered in the middle of the night, but because of his impudence in coming in the middle of the night, the man relents (11:5-8). This woman will not give up, a lesson to all who seek justice in this world. We are to fight for it, and often, that fight may take years and money and time and sacrifice. But eventually, the even the ungodly can’t take it anymore.

But what’s the immediate point? It’s actually about the Second Coming. “And the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily’” (18:6-8a). If an unrighteous judge will give justice, how much more God? This also reminds us of what Jesus taught in that parallel earlier Unit in prayer, when he said, “How much more will the Father give the Spirit to those who ask him?” (11:13). God

won't give you a serpent if you ask for a fish. Nor will he forget you or your prayers if you are one of the elect.

The [doctrine of election](#) is here. It is never far away in the Bible or the teachings of Jesus. But I think the reason it is explicit now is because things may get so difficult that even the elect would give up, were they not elect. The whole point of election is that [it does not rest upon you](#), but upon God. He chose you and he will not let you go. It is not a doctrine given to torment unbelievers, but comfort believers. If it is being used to torment believers, then it is being used as a weapon rather than medicine. And woe to him who wields God's electing grace as a weapon against the elect. What greater comfort can there be than that when I am at my weakest, God is at his strongest. When I am ready to give in, God is ready to rescue and save. For he loves me before I ever loved him.

It is no wonder that when the Reformed discuss election, the doctrine of [perseverance](#) is usually close by. And it is here too. The elect ought always to pray and never lose heart. And this is a given here as a comfort, not a command. The verbs are infinitives, not imperatives. And while the infinitive can sometimes carry the force of a command, and it is clear that Jesus wants us to do this, it is not coming strictly like the law does: *You'd better pray or else!* That isn't how he

wants prayer to be. We do not pray because a gun is held to our head. Instead, you “ought” to always pray and never lose heart. Why? Because you understand the kind of God you are dealing with.

All four of our small units in this large sixth section of the Journey to Jerusalem deals in one way or another with faith. We need **faith that works**. We saw that here, Paul and James were both true. God gives faith. But the faith he gives works, that is, it obeys God. It does what he says. Why? Because that’s literally what faith is. It is believing God that when he tells us something it is true and for our best.

This became **faith that worships**. A working faith is a worshiping faith. A faith that only works and does not worship is a faith rooted in pride and self-righteousness. It is a faith that is actually works. It forgets the God who gave it. It is only concerned with duty, not love. But true faith, the faith of a disciple of Christ, loves God and worships him out of a thankful heart for what he has done in healing us of our sin and condition, and sometimes, even of our infirmities in this world.

Then we saw a **faith that must perceive**. If you do not believe God for the things you have seen that he has done for you, how can you believe for the things that have not yet happened? That draws us back to the importance of a worshiping faith. Perception comes through worship.

But perceiving what God will do can be difficult and thus we must **pray and persevere in our faith**, knowing and believing that we will because God has called us to himself by the power of his Word and Spirit and he has not forgotten us.

But one final word appears in our passage. It is the last half of **vs. 8**. It parallels the last word of the first half, **“Your faith has made you well” (17:19)**, and it demonstrates that indeed, they are to be read together. It is a warning that each of us must consider and take to heart. **“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”** That’s the ultimate question. How do you answer? Turn to the Lord in worship and perceive the truth of who he is and what he has done for you.

Luke 17:1 And he said to his disciples, **“Temptations to sin** are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!
2 It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of **these little ones to sin**.
3 Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,
4 and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”
5 **The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”**
6 And the Lord said, “If you had **faith like a grain of mustard** seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.

20 Being **asked by the Pharisees** when **the kingdom of God** would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed,
21 nor will they say, **‘Look, here it is!’** or **‘There!’** for behold, the kingdom of God is **in the midst of you**.”
22 And **he said to the disciples**, “The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.
23 And they will say to you, **‘Look, there!’** or **‘Look, here!’** Do not go out or follow them.
24 For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day.
25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.
26 Just as it was in the **days of Noah**, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.

<p>7 “Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’?”</p> <p>8 Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’?”</p> <p>9 Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded?”</p> <p>10 So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’ ”</p>	<p>27 They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.</p> <p>28 Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building,</p> <p>29 but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—</p> <p>30 so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.</p> <p>31 On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back.</p> <p>32 Remember Lot’s wife.</p> <p>33 Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.</p> <p>34 I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left.</p> <p>35 There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left.”</p> <p>36 <i>Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left</i></p> <p>37 And they said to him, “Where, Lord?” He said to them, “Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.”</p>
<p>11 On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.</p> <p>12 And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance</p> <p>13 and lifted up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”</p> <p>14 When he saw them he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went they were cleansed.</p> <p>15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice;</p> <p>16 and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan.</p> <p>17 Then Jesus answered, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?”</p> <p>18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”</p> <p>19 And he said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”</p>	<p>18:1 And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.</p> <p>2 He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.</p> <p>3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’</p> <p>4 For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’ ”</p> <p>6 And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says.</p> <p>7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?”</p> <p>8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”</p>

Bibliography

- Buckwalter, H. Douglas. "The Hike of Hikes—Luke's Travel Narrative (Luke 9:51-19-27)," *Evangelical Journal* 33.2 (2015): 68-81.
- Derrett, J. Duncan M. *Jesus Among Biblical Exegetes*. Studies in the New Testament Vol. 6. (New York: Brill, 1995): 28-41.
- Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G. *TH293 Israelology: The Doctrine of Israel*, Logos Mobile Education. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018.
- Larkin, Clarence. *Dispensational Truth, or "God's Plan and Purpose in the Ages."* Philadelphia, PA: Clarence Larkin, 1918.
- Nolland, John. *Luke 1:1–9:20*. Word Biblical Commentary 35A. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1989.
- Ryken, Philip Graham and Doriani, Daniel M. *Reformed Expository Commentary* vol. 2. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009.