

Luke 17:1-6

"The Faith to Forgive"

January 18, 2026

1. Intro

- a. As we move into chapter seventeen of Luke's Gospel, we are nearing the end of what appears to be a **VERY long day** of teaching for Jesus
 - i. Starting back at the beginning of chapter 15, all the way up to verse 10 of chapter 17,
 1. We get no indication that the contextual setting has changed
 - ii. Great crowds were accompanying Jesus is these days,
 1. And these great crowds included tax collectors and a whole host of other sinners
 - a. Luke told us back in chapter 15 that these tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to Jesus, because they wanted to hear all the things that he had to say
 2. But among these great crowds of people, there were also a bunch of Scribes and Pharisees...
 - a. A bunch of the religious leaders in Israel
 - i. And these religious leaders were **GRUMBLING** about Jesus
 1. How can he receive such sinners in his company?
 2. How can he sit and **EAT** with these "unclean" masses?
 3. So Jesus told the crowds a series of parables in chapter 15 to give them the answer to the Pharisees' question...
 - a. He received sinners and sat down and feasted with them for this sole purpose:
 - i. All of heaven **REJOICES** when the lost are found
 1. It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick
 2. It's not the self-righteous who need a Savior, but the unrighteous
 3. It's not the prideful and arrogant men, caught up in their own traditions and religiosity, who need a Shepherd
 - a. It is the **LOST**
 - b. It is the harassed and the helpless
 - c. It is the sheep who have no shepherds that Jesus has come for
 - b. And so, Jesus feasted with "the least of these," for the Good Shepherd had come to bring the lost sheep home
 - i. The tone of chapter 15 was a tone of hopeful rejoicing
 - iii. But as we saw in chapter 16, Jesus then shifts his focus onto the religious leaders, and the tone becomes one of warning
 1. Jesus looked to the religious leaders, and he saw how they were caught up in the pursuit of money and the treasures of this world
 - a. And he said to them, "You **CANNOT** serve both God and money"
 2. He looked at how these religious leaders loved the praises of men **MORE THAN** they desired to do what was pleasing to God
 - a. And he said to them, "You have become **DIVORCED** from your God, and you are now living **IN ADULTERY**"

3. He looked at these religious leaders, who were living their lives of extravagant self-indulgence, while the people around them suffered in their physical and spiritual poverty
 - a. And he said to them, "You are in danger of the fires of Hades, for you have rejected the words of Moses and the Prophets"
- iv. Luke 16 is indeed an ominous warning for the Pharisees and Scribes who were grumbling at the company that Jesus was keeping
 1. But chapter 16 served as a warning for us as well, didn't it?
 - a. If you want to spend your life chasing after the things of this world, then Jesus says THAT is what you will receive
 - i. In our lifetime, we will receive all sorts of good things...
 1. But we will lose the eternal Paradise that has been promised
 - b. We also must CHOOSE whether we will serve the false gods of this world,
 - i. Or whether we will serve the God who holds out SALVATION, and FORGIVENESS, and LIFE ETERNAL
 1. You cannot serve both God and this world, my friends,
 - a. So CHOOSE this day who you will serve
 - v. This was what we saw in chapter 16
 - b. But now, in chapter 17, Jesus turns to his disciples
 - i. Much has been said on this day
 1. But it is time for Jesus to begin to bring it all home to his core group of followers
 - a. And so, he said to his disciples, starting in verse 1...
2. Luke 17:1
 - a. *¹And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!*
 - i. Temptations to sin are SURE to come, Jesus says to his disciples
 1. Yes, they're going to come from men like these Scribes and Pharisees who have decided to chase after the things of this world
 - a. But the world isn't the only source of the temptations, is it?
 - ii. Jesus knew more than anyone else that these temptations to sin would also come from the Devil
 1. We saw this back in Luke, chapter 4, when, before Jesus was able to officially begin his earthly ministry,
 - a. He was led BY THE HOLY SPIRIT into the wilderness, to be tempted by the Devil
 - i. For forty days, the Great Deceiver hurled temptation after temptation against Jesus
 1. And they all culminated on the last day, when Jesus was starving and exhausted,
 - ii. And the enemy tried three more times to get him to give in to the temptation to sin
 1. Satan would give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, if Jesus would simply fall to his knees, and worship him
 - b. But, in humble and faithful obedience to the will of his Father, Jesus replied to Satan,
 - i. "BE GONE Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him ONLY shall you serve!'"
 2. "Temptations to sin are sure to come," Jesus said...

- a. For our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour
- 3. “Temptations to sin are sure to come,” Jesus said...
 - a. For all the world around us is broken and fallen and set against following the things of God
- iii. But there is a third place that these temptations to sin are sure to come from...
 - 1. They are sure to come from OUR VERY OWN FLESH
 - a. This is the warning that the Apostle John gives us in 1 John 2:15-17, when he writes,
 - i. *¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*
 - 2. My friends, the temptations to sin are not all OUT THERE...
 - a. They are IN HERE as well
 - i. They're in the desires of my very own flesh
 - ii. They're in the desires of all the things that I see with my eyes and want to lust after
 - iii. They're in all of the pride and arrogance and self-righteousness that exists RIGHT HERE...
 - 1. In MY flesh!
 - 3. This is what James affirms for us in James chapter 1, when he states without apology that it is not GOD who tempts us, but rather...
 - a. *¹⁴...each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by HIS OWN desire.*
 - ¹⁵Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*
- iv. This is the stance of all the Scriptures, my friends
 - 1. In Jeremiah 17, verse 9, we read the words...
 - a. *⁹The heart is deceitful above all things, and DESPERATELY sick; who can understand it?*
 - 2. In the book of Job, Job's friend Eliphaz gets a lot of things wrong in his speeches
 - a. But one thing he does get RIGHT is when he says in Job 5:6,
 - i. *⁶For affliction does not come from the dust, nor does trouble sprout from the ground, ⁷but man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.*
 - b. Our trouble in our life doesn't just come up out of the earth
 - i. It comes from WITHIN US
 - 1. Just as it is THE NATURE of a spark to fly upward out of the fire and into the sky
 - a. So also it is our NATURE to sin
 - b. We are BORN to it!
 - ii. As David would write in Psalm 51 verse 5,
 - 1. *⁵Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*
 - v. Now, we might argue and say, “Well sure, that is how I USED TO BE, back before God transformed my heart, and clothed me in the righteousness of His Son”
 - 1. That is ABSOLUTELY true...

- a. If you are truly a born again follower of Jesus Christ, then your heart HAS BEEN changed
 - i. But YOUR FLESH has not
- vi. Just think about what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans, chapter 7
 1. Paul, the man who travelled the world, sacrificing his comforts, his titles and accomplishments, eventually even his own life – all for the sake of the Gospel
 - a. This same Paul would write in Romans 7, verses 15-23,
 - i. *¹⁵For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ²¹So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²²For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.*
 - b. Paul, in all of his glorious service to the Kingdom of God, realized this truth...
 - i. In his FLESH, he was still a DEEPLY sinful and wretched man
 1. Which is why he also realized that his ONLY hope for deliverance came not from himself
 - a. But from God, through Jesus Christ our Lord
 - vii. When Jesus says that “Temptations to sin are sure to come,” this word that he uses for “temptations to sin” is the Greek word *skandalon*
 1. That ought to sound familiar, because it is where we get our word, “scandal,” or “scandalous”
 - a. The literal meaning of the word is a trap or a snare, that people used to make out in the wild
 - i. Hunters would go out into the forest and find a young tree that was still fairly pliable,
 1. They would bend that tree over till the end got to the ground
 2. And then they would tie up a rope on the end, and rig it to where, when an animal came along and grabbed a piece of bait
 - a. It would release the trap-stick, or the *skandalon*, and the animal would get caught up in the snare
 - viii. This is indeed the scandalous nature of sin, my friends
 1. It catches us when we are most unaware
 - a. It catches us when all we want is just a taste of that piece of bait that's resting on the ground
 - i. That piece of bait that looks harmless
 - ii. That piece of bait that looks like the fruit that Adam and Eve took, as it was a “delight to the eyes”
 2. And within a moment, we are caught up in the snares of sin
 - a. And that sin, when fully grown, gives birth to death
 - ix. Woe to our great enemy, Satan, when the temptation to sin comes from him and all of his scheming against us

- x. Woe to the world around us, as the temptation to sin comes at us from all sides, as we are bombarded with it on TV, in movies, on social media, in the news
- xi. But woe TO US friends, if we fail to recognize that these temptations to sin can just as easily come from within our own flesh... our own desires
 - 1. May we ever be on the guard against the MANY trap-sticks OUT THERE, and IN HERE

3. Jesus goes on to say in Luke 17, verse 2...

- a. *²It 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.*
 - i. How could having a big millstone tied around your neck and being thrown into the sea be BETTER for anyone
 - 1. It's better, if you remember what we learned last week about the rich man who ended up in Hades
 - a. As we saw last week in Jesus' account of the rich man and Lazarus, Hades is not some sort of intermediate resting place, where everyone goes to peacefully rest until the day of judgment comes
 - i. Hades, is a place of anguish, my friends
 - 1. It is a place of great physical and mental torment
 - 2. It is a place of unending fire and unquenchable thirst
 - a. There is no leaving Hades
 - b. There is no crossing over from Hades into the Paradise of God
 - ii. Jesus said very plainly, "There is a great chasm between Hades and Paradise... and none shall EVER cross from there to here"
 - ii. How is it BETTER for someone to drown out in the sea?
 - 1. It is BETTER, when you consider that the alternative is an eternity in the fires of Hell
 - b. It is BETTER to have a millstone hung around your neck and then be drowned, than to cause one of these little ones to sin, and you end up in Hades
 - i. Now, when Jesus uses this phrase, "little ones" there are a couple of times when he is referring to little children
 - 1. But MOST OF THE TIME, when Jesus says, "little ones," he's actually referring to his disciples
 - a. This word, "mikron," was a term of endearment that Jesus gave to his true followers
 - i. If you think about it, that makes sense
 - ii. When anyone turns to Christ, and they surrender their heart to him, they are adopted into the family of God
 - 1. God is our Father
 - 2. But Jesus, the Son of God, then becomes our older brother
 - 2. This is what the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 2, verses 10 and 11,
 - a. *¹⁰For it was fitting that [God], for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation [Jesus] perfect through suffering. ¹¹For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he {Jesus} is not ashamed to call them brothers...*
 - 3. If you are truly a son or a daughter of God, then Jesus is your elder brother
 - a. And he affectionately calls you mikron... little brother... little sister
 - ii. And like the good and protective older brother that he is, Jesus says it is better for someone to be thrown in the ocean and drowned,
 - 1. Than to cause any of his little brothers or sisters to sin

- a. For only the fires of judgment await those who live their lives in unrepentant sin,
 - i. ESPECIALLY if their sin entangles and ensnares Jesus' little brothers and sisters
 - 1. Woe to that person indeed!
- iii. Now, from all that we have heard this morning, I would be much more inclined to include Jesus' following words in verse 2...
 - 1. Pay attention to yourselves!
 - a. I believe Jesus is giving his disciples, and us, a word of caution here
 - i. Be aware of what's going on in your flesh, friends
 - ii. Be on guard against the thoughts and inclinations that come from within you
 - iii. Examine yourselves, and give full attention to the desires that are waging war within you
 - 2. Again, the temptations to sin are sure to come
 - a. They are sure to come from the world and from the Devil
 - b. But they are just as sure to come from the desires within our very own flesh
 - i. So PAY ATTENTION to yourselves, so that YOU don't become the one who causes the sons and daughters of God to sin
 - 3. John Owen, one of the great fathers of the Puritan movement, said it this way...
 - a. "The person who understands the evil IN HIS OWN HEART is the only person who is useful, fruitful, and solid in his beliefs and obedience. Others only delude themselves and thus they upset families, churches, and all other relationships. In their self-pride and judgment of others, they show great inconsistency."
 - i. Pay attention to yourselves, and the desires that war within your own flesh,
 - 1. Lest you cause any of these little ones to sin
 - iv. Well, all of this that we've heard so far this morning would be enough to process for the rest of the day...
 - 1. But Jesus isn't done
 - a. In fact, he very quickly shifts the perspective of the whole discussion
- c. Temptations are sure to come...
 - i. If they come from Satan, then rebuke him, and stand firm against all of his schemes
 - ii. If they come from the world, or from your own flesh, then rebuke those as well, and wage war against the sin temptations that come from both out there and in here
 - iii. If your brother here in the church sins, then rebuke him as well
 - 1. But then what does Jesus say at the end of verse 3?
- 4. Luke 17:3-4
 - a. *... 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."*
 - i. Just take a moment and put yourself in the place of the disciples
 - 1. Jesus had just been railing against the Scribes and the Pharisees for quite some time
 - a. And, even though Jesus had just said to the disciples, "Pay attention to yourselves," surely a lot of their attention was still directed toward the Pharisees
 - i. If anyone was in danger of the fires of Hades, surely it was the Scribes and the Pharisees, right?

- ii. If anyone deserved to have a millstone tied around their necks and then thrown into the sea, surely it was the religious leaders who kept fighting AGAINST Jesus... right?
 - 1. I know that if I was a disciple there in that moment, I would likely be having thoughts of JUSTICE in my own heart
 - a. Yes, Jesus, AMEN!
 - b. That is exactly what THEY deserve
 - ii. But Jesus then shocks us to our senses and says,
 - 1. "But IF THEY REPENT, forgive them!"
 - a. And if that doesn't wake us up out of our own self-righteousness, Jesus goes on and says,
 - i. *"And if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,'*
 - b. Then Jesus says, "You MUST forgive him."
 - i. Not, "Try to forgive him."
 - ii. Not, "It would be a nice gesture to forgive him."
 - iii. No, Jesus COMMANDS us... you MUST forgive him
 - b. In Matthew chapter 18, we find the corresponding passage to our passage here in Luke this morning
 - i. And as Jesus teaches the disciples all about rebuking and repenting and restoring, Peter comes up to him and says in verse 21,
 - 1. *"Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"*
 - ii. And Jesus replies, as if he is saying, "No, Peter, you're not hearing what I am saying..."
 - 1. *"I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times"*
 - a. In other translations, it reads "seventy TIMES seven"
 - i. Jesus IS NOT interested in setting a ceiling to the limit of our forgiveness
 - ii. He's not saying, "If they repent 490 times, and you forgive them 490 times, THEN, on the 491 time you are free to NOT forgive them"
 - 2. No, Jesus is saying to his disciples, AND TO US,
 - a. Little brother... little sister... there is to be NO LIMIT to the forgiveness within your heart
 - i. For you have now been adopted into the family of the Father
 - 1. And in your adoption, HE has forgiven FAR MORE than you will EVER be expected to forgive in your lifetime
 - b. You've been brought into a family whose identity is marked through and through by FORGIVENESS
 - i. And you are expected to uphold the family name in this way
 - iii. Which is why I DO NOT believe that there should be a paragraph break between Jesus' words and the words that then flow out of the apostles' mouths in verse 5...
 - 5. Luke 17:5-6
 - a. *"The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"*
 - i. This is the appropriate response, isn't it?
 - 1. Most of us are probably pretty good at forgiving people ONCE, right?
 - a. On a good day, we might forgive someone a couple of times... maybe even THREE times if we're feeling super holy that day
 - ii. But to be willing to forgive someone, even if they repeatedly sin against us, HUNDREDS of times?

1. Isn't that a little much to ask from us?
 - a. OK, let's be honest, isn't that A LOT to ask from us?
 - i. Let's be REALLY honest... isn't that TOO MUCH to ask of us?
- b. The Apostle Paul would say, "Well, no... actually it is NOT too much to ask of you... in fact, that is simply BASELINE Christianity."
 - i. He says it this way in Colossians 3, verses 12 and 13...
 1. *¹²Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*
 - a. You're in the family now, brother
 - b. You're one of God's chosen ones now, sister
 - i. You are now therefore to be marked by compassionate and kind hearts
 - ii. You are to be marked by humility and meekness and patience
 - iii. And you are to be marked BY FORGIVENESS
 1. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also "might try" to forgive others?
 - iv. No... as the Lord has forgiven you, so also you MUST forgive
 1. Again, the command to forgive is unmistakable
 - a. As those forgiven by God, we also MUST forgive
 - c. In Matthew 6, when Jesus gives to us the Lord's prayer,
 - i. He says that we ought to pray that God's name would be hallowed and revered throughout the earth
 1. We ought to pray that His Kingdom would expand upon the earth, and that his will would be done HERE, just as it is in heaven
 - a. We pray for His daily provision in our lives, trusting that He will indeed provide for His children,
 - ii. But then Jesus says for us to pray...
 1. *¹²and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*
 - a. And then he leaves a nice little footnote to the prayer...
 - i. *¹⁴For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*
 2. You MUST forgive your brother, even if he sins against you seventy times seven times, and says "I repent" after each time...
 - a. YOU are called to forgive them INDEFINITELY
 - i. This is how the sons and daughters of God are COMMANDED to live
 - d. Now someone might ask at this point, "What if they DON'T repent? Am I free to withhold my forgiveness THEN?"
 - i. Jesus, and Paul seem to have attached two conditions to my forgiveness of others in all of these passages
 1. First, they must be a brother or sister, meaning we're talking about people INSIDE the church that have sinned against us
 2. Second, they must say with their mouth, "I repent"
 - ii. If neither of these two conditions are met, do we still have to forgive them?
 1. Well, listen to what Jesus says in Mark's Gospel, in Mark 11:23-25

a. *23Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. 24Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25And WHENEVER you stand praying, forgive, if you have ANYTHING against ANYONE, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."*

iii. Brothers and sisters, the Scriptures are clear...

1. If you are TRULY in Christ, then the record of your debt has been cancelled

a. Paul says in Colossians 2:14 that it has been set aside by God, as He nailed it all to the cross

i. So POSITIONALLY, your sin has been forgiven

iv. But as we talked about at the beginning of the sermon, we still war every single day against the sin of our flesh

1. And for those daily sins, we are still called to repent

a. For those daily sins, we are still called to confess them before God

i. For those sins, we still need forgiveness

1. NOT a legal forgiveness

2. But a relational forgiveness

a. For every time we sin, we trample underfoot the Son of God

b. We profane the covenant by which he was sanctified

c. And we outrage the Spirit of grace

ii. And in some way that we cannot fully understand, even though our position before God is secured, we will still be judged for our trespasses

b. ESPECIALLY if we withhold forgiveness from others

v. The apostles were RIGHT to say, "Lord, increase our faith!"

e. But I love the Lord's response in verse 6

6. In Luke 17:6, Jesus says to them...

a. *6"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."*

i. The modern day, name-it-and-claim-it preachers would have us believe that this verse applies to our health and wealth and prosperity

1. If you just had the faith the size of a mustard seed, you could speak that raise at work into existence!

2. If you just had the faith the size of a mustard seed, you could rebuke that cancer, and it will obey you!

ii. But that's not the context AT ALL of what Jesus is teaching here, is it?

1. The right application of this passage is this...

a. *"If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, then you would have the faith to forgive ANYONE who sins against you in ANY way, even if they should sin against you time after time after time"*

i. If your faith was just as big as a mustard seed, THEN you could forgive in this way

iii. It's helpful to hear what Jesus also says about mustard seeds in Matthew 13, verses 31 and 32, when he says,

1. *31"The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. 32IT IS THE SMALLEST OF ALL SEEDS, but when it has grown it is larger*

than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

- a. When Jesus says that the mustard seed is “the smallest of all seeds” he uses a word that is now familiar to us... mikron
 - i. Mikron was the term of affection Jesus has for ALL of his brothers and sisters
- b. Don’t miss the play on words here...
 - i. If you have faith like a mikron
 - 1. Jesus’ disciples are his mikron
 - ii. Do you see?
 - 1. We don’t need some kind of second-level faith to be able to forgive others as we are commanded to forgive them
 - iii. Jesus is saying that if you are one of his mikron, then you ALREADY HAVE mikron-sized faith
- iv. We pray along with the disciples, “Lord, increase our faith!”
 - 1. But Jesus replies to us, “Little brother, that faith is already within you!”
 - a. “Little sister, that faith was part of the package deal!”
 - i. You’ve BEEN GIVEN a new heart by our Father
 - ii. You’ve BEEN GIVEN a new spirit, as He has caused HIS SPIRIT to dwell within you
 - 1. You don’t need me to increase your faith, you just need to understand who you already are!
 - 2. According to 1 Peter 2:9-10,
 - a. You are now part of a chosen race
 - b. You are now part of a royal priesthood
 - c. You are now part of holy nation, a people for God’s own possession
 - d. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people
 - e. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy
 - i. We would not be wrong in the least to add to Peter’s list...
 - 1. Once, you had not experienced forgiveness, BUT NOW, through the grace of God, and the sacrificial death of Jesus upon the cross...
 - a. The record of your debt has been cancelled
 - b. Now, you have received more forgiveness than you could ever deserve
 - v. Peter says that God did all of this SO THAT we may now go forth and proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light
 - 1. What better way can we proclaim His excellencies, than by saying to someone who has sinned against us time after time after time,
 - a. “I forgive you... just as my Father in Heaven has forgiven me”
 - i. That’s just what we do in my Father’s house!