

CAPITOL STUDIES

MARCH 4, 2026 • WEEK 8



LUKE FOR LEGISLATORS SECOND SESSION

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Theme Verse

Luke 19:10

For the Son of Man has come to **seek** and to **save** that which was **lost**.



The Servant's Duty



WHAT DID I DO TO DESERVE THIS? After all I've done for God and people, why did this happen to me? I give and give and nobody seems to appreciate my efforts. I give my wife all she wants and she never considers what I need. Nobody seems to recognize my efforts—my kids, my fellow workers, my friends at church. What's the use? Who cares that I do what's right and give myself and my resources to make this a better world?

Sound familiar? Ever feel that way? Who hasn't? "We expect rewards. It's built into our system of give and take. Most of us love to be loved, give to receive, work to be praised and paid handsomely. It's part of our ethic.... We project that to God.... Luke 17:5-10 is shocking. It attacks our motivations and cuts into our value system. Our ways of relating to God and each other are contradicted. Look carefully. He meant what He said."¹

Today we are looking at the Parable of the Unworthy Servant (or Slave) and the discourse leading up to it. These verses share the pathos that go with relationships. Here are people called disciples, little children, brothers, apostles, and then there is the Master, Jesus. Here also are the problems these people carry.

Arin Hess

Pastor Arin Hess, *Chaplain, Capitol Studies*



I. RELATIONSHIPS AND FORGIVENESS

A. Don't Cause a Believer to Stumble

Luke 17:1-2

He 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."²

Jesus continues in conversation with His disciples, reminding them that Christians will stumble. We expect that people in the world will entice Christians to sin on many occasions. For that, they will be judged. But it should never be another believer who leads a believer into sin. In the presentation of this parable by Matthew (in Matt. 18:1-7), Jesus implies that true believers are like little children. They humbly recognize that they are helpless on their own, so they simply put their trust in God. They are His children and, as such, are under His protection.

The word for *stumble* in the Greek is *skandalon*. "A *skandalon* was a baited cage with a spring-loaded door, not unlike a rabbit trap. Later writers used the term figuratively to describe any means by which a person is brought to his or her end."³ Jesus warns that it would be better to die than to cause one of "these little ones" to sin. He goes so far as to say that a millstone should be hung around the neck of one who is a stumbling block, and he should be dropped to the bottom of the sea. This was a terrifying depiction of being lost forever. "Gentiles used this form of execution, and therefore it was particularly repulsive to the Jews."⁴ A millstone, used for grinding grain, was so huge that it took a donkey to turn it.

What kinds of things might cause someone to trip or stumble? Greed, pride, lust, addictions. Perhaps it is the self-righteousness of a believer, which might include majoring on minor or minoring on major tenets of Scripture and, thus, completely missing the true mark.

B. Do Call a Brother to Repentance

Luke 17:3-4

Be 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.

Jesus is concerned about His children. He asks each to be alert and vigilant in regard to the sinful actions of other believers, so they can be quickly called back to repentance. Sometimes it is necessary to rebuke or call attention to the wrongdoing to help a brother face responsibility. But no matter how often a person sins, if he or she comes back in true repentance, we are to forgive. Because a sinful word, deed, or both can hurt or offend deeply, this requires "instantaneous action or action to begin at once. An offense that lingers without redress is like an open wound; even a tiny cut can become infected, jeopardizing the entire body."⁵



The wrongdoer **repents** of the wrong, asking forgiveness. The right-doer **releases** (forgives) the other person of the debt they owe. Pastor and poet George Herbert wrote, “He who cannot forgive breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass.”⁶

“Mature Christians understand that forgiveness is not a cheap exchange of words, the way squabbling children often flippantly say ‘I’m sorry’ to each other. True forgiveness always involves pain; somebody has been hurt and there is a price to pay in healing the wound. Love *motivates* us to forgive, but faith *activates* that forgiveness so that God can use it to work blessings in the lives of His people.”⁷

II. RESOURCES AND FAITH

Luke 17:5-6

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

Now Luke calls Jesus’ disciples *apostles*—a term for those of Jesus’ followers who were given a special commission because they were eyewitnesses of His teaching, healing, rescuing, and equipping. They were called in a unique way to follow Him. Apostles are not a part of our world today since no one today is an eyewitness of Jesus.

These apostles have a simple request: “Increase our faith!” They want a robust faith to do the Master’s bidding. They’ve seen what it takes to follow Jesus. “The Lord bluntly tells them that they do not need more faith. The smallest amount of faith can accomplish the miraculous. Faith is not measured by its bigness or littleness. What is needed is not so much a *large* faith as a *living* faith—faith in the Lord Himself and in His indwelling Holy Spirit. Surely, that is an infinite resource suitable for any occasion!”⁸

Jesus uses the power of words to masterfully illustrate this: “All it takes is faith like a mustard seed.” Mustard seeds are very tiny, approximately one millimeter in size. But, around the Sea of Galilee, the mustard plant can grow up to 10-15 feet tall. A mulberry tree has roots growing as deep as 13 feet and extending 30-40 feet from the trunk. Physically, it would be difficult to impossible to uproot a mulberry tree and plant it in the sea. The apostles know that. Yet Jesus is saying faith the size of a mustard seed can get the job done. A small faith can do mighty things.

“A small congregation in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains built a new sanctuary on land that had been lovingly willed to them by a church member. Ten days before the scheduled dedication service, the local building inspector delivered troubling news to the pastor: the parking lot was too small for a building of that size. Until the church doubled its parking capacity, they would not be permitted to use the new sanctuary.

“The problem was obvious and overwhelming. The church had used every inch of available land—except for the mountain rising directly





behind the building. To create more parking, they would literally have to move the mountain. Undaunted, the pastor stood before the congregation the following Sunday morning and made an unusual announcement. That evening, he said, he would meet with all members who had ‘mountain-moving faith.’ Together they would pray, asking God to remove the mountain from behind the church and to somehow provide the funds needed to have the new parking area paved and painted before the dedication service.

“That evening, at the appointed time, 24 of the church’s 300 members gathered to pray. For nearly three hours they cried out to God, asking Him to do what seemed humanly impossible. At ten o’clock, the pastor concluded the meeting with a final ‘Amen.’ ‘We’ll open next Sunday as scheduled,’ he told them confidently. ‘God has never let us down before, and I believe He will be faithful this time as well.’

“The next morning, as the pastor sat working in his study, there came a loud knock at the door. When he called out, ‘Come in,’ a rough-looking construction foreman stepped inside, removing his hard hat as he entered. ‘Excuse me, Reverend,’ the man said. ‘I’m with Acme construction over in the next county. We’re building a large shopping mall, and we’re in desperate need of fill dirt. I was wondering, would you be willing to sell us a portion of the mountain behind your church?’

“The pastor listened in stunned silence as the foreman continued. ‘We’ll pay you for all the dirt we remove,’ he said, ‘and if you’ll let us have it right away, we’ll pave and stripe the entire exposed area at no cost to you. We can’t move forward on our project until the dirt is removed and allowed to settle.’ The little church held its dedication service the very next Sunday—just as planned. And interestingly enough, there were far more members with ‘mountain-moving faith’ in attendance that day than there had been the week before.”⁹

“The matter is not so much great faith in God, but rather faith in a great God.”¹⁰

III. RESPONSIBILITIES AND FAITHFULNESS

Luke 17:7-10

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”?⁸ But 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”?⁹ He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he?¹⁰ So 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.”

A. The Slave

The *slave* here is likely a “voluntary indenture,” basically a faithful, long-time employee. “A faithful servant should not expect any special reward, since he did only what he was told to do. The word translated



‘unprofitable’ [KJV], [‘unworthy,’ ESV], means ‘without need’—that is, ‘nobody owes us anything.’ The servant was indeed profitable; after all, he cared for his master’s fields, flocks, and food. The statement means, ‘My master does not owe me anything extra.’ *The fact that Jesus will reward His servants is wholly a matter of God’s grace. We do not deserve anything because we have obeyed Him and served Him.*”¹¹ “We need to remember at all times our lowly position before Him. We are but dust and ashes in His presence. He owes us nothing; we owe Him everything. He does not owe us; He owns us as His slaves. As such, **we owe Him** obedience, even when His commands seem difficult.”¹²

B. The Service

“What then is the proper attitude for Christian service? ‘Doing the will of God from the heart’ (Eph. 6:6). ‘If you love Me, keep My commandments’ (John 14:15, NKJV). To the person who is born again, ‘His commandments are not grievous’ (1 John 5:3). Serving Him is a delight, not just a duty, and we obey Him because we love Him. ‘I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart’ (Ps. 40:8).”¹³

“There is no praise or glory in doing your duty. Duty is what is expected of a person. I would venture to say that if you show up at work on time, your boss does not say, ‘Thank you so much for being here on time! It’s just wonderful how you do that day after day!’ You’re expected to be at work on time. It’s your duty. You don’t crow about paying your bills, do you? You owe that money; you are expected to pay. The point is, we don’t earn brownie points with God for doing what He has commanded us to do. It’s expected for slaves to do what the master commands.”¹⁴

CONCLUSION

“God’s way of motivating us toward obedience and humility is to keep us focused on the cross of Jesus Christ. As Paul said, ‘the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me’ (Gal. 2:20). ‘May it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world’ (Gal. 6:14). Or, as Isaac Watts put it,

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

If you’re struggling with some difficult command that you know God wants you to obey, look to the cross, where Jesus gave Himself for you. That is one reason our Lord ordained that we come often to His Table, to remember Him and His sacrificial death for us. In light of that, is any demand He makes of us too difficult? As we come to His Table, let’s exercise the simple faith that His faithfulness calls forth. And let’s focus on greater obedience and humility as His unworthy slaves.”¹⁵


Chaplain Arin Hess



FOOTNOTES

1. Lloyd John Ogilvie, *Autobiography of God: God Revealed in the Parables of Jesus*, Regal Books, 1979, pg. 166-168.
2. All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, 1995 Update.
- 3, 5. Charles Swindoll, *Insights on Luke*, Zondervan, 2012, pg. 404-405.
4. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, Word Publishing, 1997, pg. 1425.
- 6, 7, 11, 13. Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Victor Books, 1996, Volume 1, pg. 243-244.
8. John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Luke: An Expository Commentary*, Kregel Publications, 2009.
9. Tim Burt, *Fresh Manna Devotions*, November 8, 2024, <https://timburt.org>.
- 10, 12, 14, 15. Steven J. Cole, "Lesson 78: More Faith or More Obedience? (Luke 17:5-10)," *Bible.org*, October 10, 1999.

Personal Study Notes



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WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Meeting during the
109th Legislature's
Second Session

SENATORS

6:45 – 7:45 A.M.
Wednesdays
Capitol Office #1004

STAFF

12:00 – 1:00 P.M.
Wednesdays
NE State Office Building
Morrill Room