

## A Word about Faith and Obedience

Luke 17.1–10

### Sermon

Perh no one more vilified in minds of NYers than Robert Moses, exc maybe our pres. For decades Moses parks commissioner, blamed for tearing up nabes through abuse of power. If you read Robert Caro’s bio, might be surprised to learn how it all started: recog that kids living in slums needed outlet. Ergo parks in city & parkways to get out. Unfortunately his solution may have created more probs than solved. Ills something about **human nature**: often rightly ID that we’re in need but wrongly ID what need is. Such is case in today’s txt. At 1st glance, appears that what we have here is quite like a series of proverbs, string of disconnected exhortations, impos to outline bc no outline was intended. Seems to be what Lk does here: no rhyme/reason for order.

But I want to suggest that while this psg is proverbial, not at all a string of disconnected statements. In fact each bit **fits quite snugly** w others, if only you look more closely. § You see that there are four bits of teaching that comprise this psg: statement about causing peo to stumble (1–3a), statement about forgiveness (3b–4), interjection by discs (5), reply conc faith (6), then of course the parable (7–10). Challenge of preaching this txt: could be four sermons. But like floral arrangements you bought for mothers in your life today, so these four diverse blooms thoughtfully placed to communicate a single msg.

Each in turn. **1st bit** has to do w § *cause peo to stumble* (1). Lit. § trap, something desirable to ensnare unsuspecting. Here not phys but moral, leading peo into sin. How clear-eyed J is: doesn’t behold gen good world w no moral traps §, but asserts *bound to come*. Yet warning not, “Watch out for traps!” § but “Don’t be the one who sets them!” woe a warning. My paraphrase: § “Moral traps bound to come, but those who set them as good as dead.” Millstone!

Now who is he **talking about**? Ans emerges if we think through context. J just gave parable of rich man & Laz. No break. Taught that rich man was paying for his sin of spending privilege on self/living w/o concern for others. Ergo he was tormented by Laz comforted. But remember: rich man not a pagan but part of cov comm. How was he led into this sin? into thinking that his wealth a sign of G's sure blessing? By relig leaders, who themselves § *loved money* (16.14). See how moral trap is set? § Predator: relig leaders. Prey: rich man. Bait: promise of blessing. What do relig leaders get? Rich man, i.e., access to wealth. But snare that gave rich man to Phars in fact a trap that led man on in his sin. Ensnared by greed & self-centeredness. Ergo rich man ult goes to hell, sill punished for his sins. But those who set trap in even greater danger.

Not only a word for Phars §: J concs by saying to his discs, *Watch yourselves*. A sin anyone, even followers of X/esp, can commit. § Manipulating spouse w silent treatment. § Manipulating boss w ingratiation. § Manipulating bels w threats. Warning vs manipulation.

§ Brings us to **2nd bit** on forgiveness. These two directly related. Both deal w sin on interpers plane. 1st J talks about leading others to sin, now he moves on to discuss what to do when others sin vs you. § Two exhortations & I'm not sure which is harder. For some *rebuke* very difficult. Rather let bygones be bygones/not bring up uncomfortable matters/pretend it never happened. J says No & reiterates Heb Scrs (Lev 19.17, *rebuke your nabe*). But *rebuke* not angry confrontation/getting off chest/let them have it. Goal is restoration of relat. Ergo *forgive*. Means release: doesn't mean to forget sin but to free sinner. Not saying "it was nothing, don't worry about it." Forgiveness acks that a real sin was committed & says "that was in fact wrong & yet I release you/won't hold your action vs me." CSL's ill of someone breaking promise & asking forgiveness: "This doesn't mean that you must nec bel his next promise. § It does mean that you must make every effort to kill every taste of resentment in your own heart—every wish to humiliate or

hurt him or to pay him out” (181). Release them from obligations their sin created. § & not just one time, but as often as nec: *seven times*.

Do you see what J doing by giving these instructions? Not just showing us path of r but showing us something about ourselves. We may affirm rightness of his law but following it is not easy. In fact imposs. § & **discs** get it, see brokenness of their own hearts. So they **interrupt J** w a prayer §: *increase our faith*. Recog something deficient in themselves, conc prob is they don't have enough faith to carry out these obligations & that wo more faith they're as good as dead. § Friends, this is what law is supposed to do: reveal G's standard for living, expose our flaws & fund brokenness, move us to prayer. What I aim to do in every serm I preach. Whether or not I am successful, my goal every Sun is to let full weight of law crush us. Ergo so reg direct app re sin to professing Xians & not merely to soc at large: law doesn't condemn them, condemns us. Ill of preaching on four soils: *good & noble heart* not poss, we need something, that's J's pt. Reason we confess our sins every wk. § Jamey Smith: “Body of X is that unique comm of prac whose members own up to the fact that we don't always love what we say we do—that ‘devices & desires’ of our hearts outstrip our best intentions” (30).

But what discs do is not precisely confess their sin. Instead they ask for more faith. & if you walk away from this psg saying, “Yes, that's what I need,” you'll have missed the pt. Bc **J's reply** to their prayer isn't, “You got it, more faith coming right up!” § Instead he gives this word about *mustard seed*, famously smallest of all seeds. Don't miss this: J not saying, “Your faith is so small that mustard seed way more substantial, so get to work & grow that faith!” No, what he's saying is, “The size of your faith isn't the issue; if it were you'd only need a teeny bit to do extraordinary things. Issue not the size of your faith, so your prayer is actually wrong-headed. You're right to conc that there's something broken in you that needs to be corrected. But prob not size of your faith. Prob is you don't know the obj of faith.”

§ & that's why J launches into **parable of unworthy servs**: to show them their prob is not w size of their faith but obj of their faith. Familiar pic to 1st hearers: not wealthy man w lots of servs but ordinary landowner w one serv. Slavery in ANE not like Amer exp: more an indentured serv, poss bc of debt or warfare. Still prop of owner, tho, but owner took care of them: "did not have to worry about where their next meal would come from or whether or not they would have a place to stay" (27). So don't get caught up in modern notions of hospitality, e.g., why not have him sit & eat? or § shouldn't master say Thank you? Good masters provided for servs: *you may eat & drink* (8). But serv still a serv, had resps to fulfill, obligated to obey master. § Ergo J's conc: *done our duty*.

See how J is **tying this all tog**? § Gives us commands to fulfill, which breaks discs/self-reliance, leaves them thinking they need more faith. But J says issue is not amt of faith you have; issue is obj of faith. Whom do you bel? In whom have you placed your trust? Ans: J. & who is J? § The L (5), Master, One w right to comm anything he wants. So obeying his comms—manipulation/rebuke/forgiveness—beyond our ability, but no more than a duty given to us by our L, one which we must perform.

But that's not all, for how did we become slaves of J? Free peo who were conquered & taken vs our will? No, debtors to another master, § ensnared by sin & headed for same destiny as rich man. & doubly guilty bc like Phars we've set traps for others. How then did we become discs of J? How did he buy us out of slavery? Redeemed us by becoming Serv of L/Serv we've failed to be: never manipulated others, but pointed out sin & freely offered forgiveness. & then in grace § he went hungry & thirsty while he prepared a feast for us to enjoy. & for our brokenness J took millstone we deserved, tied it to his own neck & was plunged into sea of G's wrath so that we never would. That's what one of those who heard this parable meant § when he said that *you were redeemed w precious blood of X* (1Pet 1.18–19). How broken peo like us become discs, not by having a lot of faith but by having faith in the right Pers.

How law functions §: 1st convicts us of sin, shows us our brokenness, leads us to repentance. Then drives us to J, leads us to bel the gos (J lived/died/rose). Finally shows us how to live, instructs us for life, leads us to obed. A cycle that we need to repeat daily, even hourly, bc we're constantly tempted to misID what's wrong w us. We might rightly ID we're in need, but mistaken if we think we just need more faith/try harder/do more. Our failures are meant not to steel our resolve but to break us of self-reliance, to make us look at our perf Sav, to repent & bel gos again, to hear words of assurance that for these sins too we are pardoned. Ill of OofW. Only from that vantage pt, w ears renewed by Sp can we grow in obed. § Ergo 2Cor 3.18. J-centered obed. Path of sanc not one in which we recog sin less & less w/in ourselves but one in which we recog it more & more. § Ergo can't jump from 1 to 3. Frankly what most serms do bc what most Xians do: "I sinned so I'll try harder/make more commitments." No, when we sin we must go back to J. Only grace found in J will strengthen us to obey. & when we fail to obey, we move from 3 to 1 and need to go back to 2.

& when we see J as he is, as our L/One who demands ourselves, then we are enabled by his Sp to do extraordinary things. § Maybe not trees being uprooted & tossed into sea, but perh something even more extraordinary, like stopping your manipulative ways or lovingly going to those who sin against you or releasing them from their sin. IOW maybe really extraordinary thing wouldn't be trees obeying you § but broken peo like you & me obeying J. If G did that in us, wouldn't that be truly miraculous?