

Radical

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”
(Matthew 5:27–28 ESV)*

*Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.
(Luke 6:36 ESV)*

*For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
(Matthew 5:20 ESV)*

Radical Community

September 15th, 2019

Luke 17:1-4

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning church! I’d love for you to open your Bibles now to Luke 17:1-4; that’s on page 876 in your pew Bibles. This is our last message in the Radical series and I must say that even though I found these messages to be very hard to write and very hard to hear I will be sad to see this series go. There is a constant gravitational pull from the culture and I would say, also from inside ourselves, that would seek to warp and distort the Christian witness in every generation. Jesus set us on a path going THIS WAY but our hearts and our culture are constantly pulling us THAT WAY and so every generation has to fight AFRESH the battle for a distinctive Christian witness.

These passages have reminded us that the Jesus way is NOT the way of the world – and it is not the way of the heart – it is the way of faith – and we have to choose it every day that we live upon this earth. So hear now the Word of the Lord again, beginning at verse 1 of Luke 17:

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.” (Luke 17:1–4 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Once again, this is one of those passages that isn’t terribly hard to understand – it is just very hard to live out. What Jesus is calling for here is a **RADICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY**. This Jesus Way is a **NARROW WAY** but it is **NOT A SOLO WAY**. In fact you cannot live this way unless you commit to **RADICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY**.

In this passage we can observe 4 distinct characteristics of this community.

4 Characteristics Of Radical Christian Community:

The first thing we see is an urgent call to watchfulness.

1. Watchfulness

Look at verse 3. After telling the disciples that temptations are a given in this life he says, therefore:

“Pay attention to yourselves!” (Luke 17:3 ESV)

Stay awake! Stay alert! The devil is out to get you! He is like a lion prowling around your church seeking whom to devour – so you’ve got to post a guard! You have to keep your eyes open! You have to watch each other’s backs!

Jesus said this sort of thing all the time. In Matthew 16 he told the disciples:

“Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” (Matthew 16:6 ESV)

Keep an eye on each other’s doctrine for any hints of legalism, nominalism, formalism and ritualism. And if you see anything like that creeping in to your brother’s life, then point it out.

The Apostle Paul did this for brother Peter – do you remember that? Paul was preaching the Gospel in Galatia and his church had a mixture of Jews and Gentiles in it but they were all one in Christ and Peter was there for a while helping out and checking on their progress but then when some important Jews came from the Jerusalem church, Peter panicked and he reverted for a second to his instinctive Pharisaism and he began to practice a very unchristian form of separation. And Paul – who was WATCHING HIM – just like Jesus said – he was watching him and he CALLED HIM OUT. Galatians 2:11-14 says:

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (Galatians 2:11–14 ESV)

That is Paul doing EXACTLY what Jesus told his disciples to do.

“Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” (Matthew 16:6 ESV)

Christians watch each other! Not to CATCH EACH OTHER in mistakes but to help each other stay in the truth. We do this with doctrine and we do this with behavior. It is part of the deal – it is part of what makes the church A RADICAL COMMUNITY. We’re like the Marines. We are committed to the idea that no one gets left behind. We’re making a count and we’re checking it twice – we’re watchful.

The second radical thing we see here is a commitment to accountability.

2. Accountability

Of course these two go together just like they did in the story of Paul and Peter. Paul was watching Peter and when Peter began to slide back into Pharisaic legalism Paul held him accountable – just like Jesus said to do. Look at verse 3 again:

“Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him” (Luke 17:3 ESV)

So we’re watching and if you begin to drift away from the faith in terms of your belief or your behavior we’re going to grab you. Again – not to catch you in error – but to help you stay the course. In fact, in the same letter where Paul talks about holding Peter accountable he also talks about the DANGER of attempting to do that. In Galatians 6:1-3 he says:

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” (Galatians 6:1–3 ESV)

So there is a huge danger here that we are going to do this wrong. Whenever you try to hold a brother accountable you take your spiritual life into your own hands. It is so easy to be HARSH and condemnatory. It is SO EASY to delight in shaming or bringing another person down – and I would say if you see that in your heart, you better address that first before taking another step toward your brother. Paul says that this whole accountability thing has to be done in a spirit of gentleness and humility or we are going to end up committing WORSE SINS than the ones we are concerned about in other people.

So this is a risky undertaking but it is a necessary undertaking. I. Howard Marshall says here that:

“The disciple has a duty to admonish an offender so that he does not remain guilty of sin but has an opportunity to repent”¹.

Are you seeing that?

¹ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 642.

Even though it's hard to do – even though its risky – we have to do it because SIN is SERIOUS BUSINESS.

I wonder sometimes if we even understand the seriousness and viciousness of sin.

Sin steals joy and beauty from people and makes them slaves to deceitful and destructive things.

Take sexual sin for an example. Pornography is the ultimate deceit. It makes you feel like you are experiencing intimacy when in fact you are just abusing some poor young woman in a sweatshop. Pornography is a form of slavery and exploitation – but it doesn't present as such. It presents as cheap pleasure and risk free intimacy.

But that's a lie and it is a lie that keeps you from ever experiencing that which is real.

Jean Twenge is a professor of Psychology at San Diego State University and she wrote a book recently exploring the mental health impact of modern technology. She spends a fair bit of time talking about the impact of pornography. She cites a study that found that a growing number of young men are unable to be aroused by actual sex due to their unprecedented and unrelenting exposure to hard core pornography. One young man she interviewed – who started watching pornography when he was 9 – said that he was unable to have actual sex when he first attempted it, saying: “There was a disconnect between what I wanted in my mind and how my body reacted.”²

That is absolutely horrifying!

We have a whole generation of men who cannot enjoy that which is real and beautiful and meaningful - when done God's way – because they have been ENSLAVED by that which is fake, soul destroying and deceitful.

And it's not just men and pornography – sometimes we act as if that's the only sin out there. It's not. This applies just as well to the sin of gossip. Gossip destroys the possibility of real

² Jean M. Twenge, *iGen* (New York: Atria Books, 2017), 212.

community. Gossip makes the church an unsafe place. Gossip makes you FEEL like an important person, but eventually it turns you into a leper that nobody wants to come within a hundred feet of.

Gossip lies to you and steals something beautiful from you and leaves you with something useless – that’s how all sin works – and so leaving people in that situation is ultimately an act of hatred.

We have to do better.

Jesus is telling us to do better here.

He is saying that if we see a brother or sister beginning to fall under the power of one of these sins - we need to take action. We need to fight! Not with them – but for them! That’s part of what it means – that’s part of what it takes to build a radical Christian community.

We need to watch each other, we need to correct each other – and then thanks be to God, we need to forgive each other.

3. Forgiveness

Jesus says:

“Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3 ESV)

Now obviously, in that sentence there is a pretty important precondition. IF HE REPENTS we are commanded to forgive him. So what does that mean? The Greek New American Standard Dictionary defines it this way:

“to change one’s mind or purpose”³

Strong’s Greek Dictionary has it:

³*Greek Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. “μετανοεω,” paragraph 3480.

“to think differently or afterwards, i.e. reconsider (morally, feel compunction): — repent.”⁴

So putting that all together it seems that there is a change in how the person is feeling, thinking and acting. They’ve pulled up. They’ve seen the sin and they’ve hated it and disavowed it and agreed with the person who is helping them that this is wrong, this is bad, this is destructive and they have charted a new course.

That is repentance!

And if the person does that – then they are to be immediately forgiven.

Because, remember, this was never about shaming them! This was never about scoring points! This was never about exercising power – this was always, only about helping them! This is about rescue – not punishment! So as soon as they turn away – as soon as they agree with their pursuers – the matter is dropped.

That is literally what “forgiveness” means. The Greek word used there means “to let go”, “to leave it alone” or “to remit”.

Now, just as some churches and some Christians have a hard time with the first part of this process – the watch and rebuke part – so also some folks have a hard time with the second part – the forgive and forget part. We see this also in the Bible.

In 2 Corinthians we assume that the guy in question is the same guy that Paul rebuked the church for not confronting about his sin in 1 Corinthians 5. If you remember the story, there was a guy in 1 Corinthians 5 who seduced his father’s wife – so this would be his step mother who was probably about his age. He seduced this young woman and took her into his bed. He shamed his father and corrupted his mother in law and everyone in the church knew about it. In fact, they thought they were acting in a loving manner by not rebuking this guy. So Paul corrected them

⁴*Strong’s Greek Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “paragraph 1.

firmly and said that they had to confront this brother and even kick him out of the church if he didn't immediately repent.

So they did.

They screwed up their courage and excommunicated him – they declared that they no longer considered him to be a believer and they said that he was no longer welcome at the Lord's Table. That's huge!

And it seems to have worked! It put the fear of God into this brother and he repented. But the church was unsure now as to whether or not they should take him back and so Paul writes to them and says:

For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough,⁷ so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.⁸ So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him... so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs. (2 Corinthians 2:6–11 ESV)

Paul says: “The brother did what we asked him to do! He turned around! Now you've got to turn around to him! You've got to forgive him and restore him. You've got to put it out of your minds and treat him as if it never happened. As far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our sins from us – that's the Gospel – so you've got to apply that now to this dear brother.”

That's radical!

That's HUGE and some of us struggle with that part of the process. We want to make people pay. We feel like if people don't pay then other people might be encouraged in their sin and so we want to raise the bar HIGHER than Jesus.

And what do we call that brothers and sisters?

We call that legalism.

And Jesus said:

“Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees” (Matthew 16:6 ESV)

There is a ditch on either side of this impossibly narrow way – that’s why Paul said in 2 Corinthians that we need to forgive this brother:

“so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.” (2 Corinthians 2:6–11 ESV)

You see that? The devil doesn’t care how he gets us as long as he gets us. He is just as happy with the coward who never confronts as he is with the Pharisee who never forgives. Either way he wins. So let’s just do what Jesus said. Let’s watch, rebuke and forgive – if we do that, then we frustrate all the devil’s designs – hallelujah!

And then finally, in terms of these 4 characteristics, we need to watch, we need to rebuke, we need to forgive and we need to be patient.

4. Patience

Look at the passage one last time:

“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.” (Luke 17:3–4 ESV)

Woah! If you didn’t understand what was radical about this passage, you are seeing it now.

Seven times in a day! That’s insane! Leon Morris says here:

“From the world’s point of view a sevenfold repetition of an offence in one day must cast doubt on the genuineness of the sinner’s repentance. But that is not the believer’s business. His business is forgiveness.”⁵

⁵Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 273.

Now, Jesus is using colourful language and hyperbole here – I'm not even sure if you could go through this entire process 7 times in a day – but the point itself is brutally obvious. Jesus is simply saying here that the Christian community never runs out of patience with truly repentant people.

Because we understand – better than anybody - that sin is BRUTAL. We understand that the DEVIL IS A MONSTER. We understand that once sin gets inside you it carves out HOLES in your soul and it undermines all your spiritual defenses.

Nobody walks away from sin unaffected.

You can be forgiven – but you will carry the SCARS from your sin for the rest of your natural life. You get forgiveness now – but you don't get a remade body – you don't have all your tears wiped away and all your infirmities healed – until you see Christ in eternity – so every sin now makes us weaker and more vulnerable before the next.

That's a fact.

And that's the reason why in the Christian community we have to be infinitely patient with truly repentant sinners.

Notice in the text that the hypothetical individual REPENTS seven times in the day. So he is sinning but he is not surrendering. So he's a Christian – just having a real hard time with the process.

Listen to me very carefully – a real Christian isn't perfect. But a real Christian repents every time he is confronted with his sin.

That is DEFINITIONAL to being SAVED by grace and FILLED with the Holy Spirit.

So we don't excommunicate REPENTANT sinners. We excommunicate PERSISTENT SINNERS – people who stay on the path and don't turn back. We excommunicate HARDENED SINNERS –

people who no longer respond to the concern and rebukes of their brothers and sisters in Christ. We excommunicate STUBBORN SINNERS – people who hide and defend and conceal sin as opposed to confessing it.

But if you repent – even 7 times in a day – then we are going to take you back and we’re going to help you get started again – 7 times in a day. We will never WINK AT SIN – but we will never give up on truly REPENTENT SINNERS.

That’s who we are.

One of the commentators I read on this passage put it this way:

“A church is a collection of people receiving and giving correction as we avoid temptation while living for Jesus.”⁶

That sounds good – but it also sounds pretty close to impossible. How in the world are we ever going to do this? The disciples must have had the same question because in the very next verse they say to the Lord:

“Increase our faith!” (Luke 17:5 ESV)

Yeah! No kidding.

There is no way we are doing this without help from Jesus so let’s ask for that. Let’s use our final couple of minutes to identify a few things we are going to need to more of if we are ever going to build a radical Christian community in this place.

O Lord Help!

As I thought about this and prayed about this, 4 things came immediately to mind. First of all we are going to need more:

⁶ Thabiti Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus In Luke*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2018), 255.

i. Humility

It takes humility to know that you know that you need this kind of community! It takes humility to sign up for church membership in the first place because that is basically just admitting that you can't follow Jesus on your own. You need other people watching you and helping you.

Membership is you admitting that – and therefore it is generally pride that keeps people from going through with it. “I don't need membership! I don't need a bunch of people telling me what to do.”

Well I sure do. And so do most of the people here.

None of this works without humility. So obviously we need to ask Jesus for more of that. We're also going to need more courage because confronting people – or even just helping people can be an absolutely terrifying proposition.

ii. Courage

Now, I would say that 9 times out of 10 this goes WAY better than you expect. You screw up your courage and you kindly and humbly point something out and the person is so thankful and they immediately begin to make changes and they start to grow again – and you are glad you did it. But 1 time out of 10 it goes horribly and painfully wrong. They are angry. They are offended. They accuse you of meddling and judging and they come after you and ---- wow! It is really unpleasant.

That does happen – about once every 10 times but it is the fear that this will be that time that keeps us from doing it.

So we need to pray for courage and right along with that, we need to pray for a sense of urgency.

iii. Urgency

Because that is the only thing that will overcome our fear of this entire process. The awareness of what precisely is at stake. When brothers and sisters persist in sin they obscure the Gospel and they place the spiritual well-being of the little ones at risk – that was the original occasion for this

teaching. To keep that from happening, Jesus says, we have to take extreme measures and that's what we've been looking at in this message – the extreme measures. But go back up and look again at the original occasion – it's in verses 1-2. Jesus says that if we let sin go then we will eventually make the little ones stumble.

Stop and hear that.

Brother! Sister! If you are covering sin today you need to understand this: you are hurting your little ones and mine. They will doubt the Gospel because of you.

That's what Jesus says – and you need to be concerned about that, because Jesus said that the fate for people who cause our little ones to stumble is too horrific to even imagine. He says:

“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.” (Luke 17:2 ESV)

Imagine standing on a boat with a rope tied around your neck and secured at the other end to a thousand pound rock. Then imagine that rock being cast into the sea and that rope snapping tight and dragging you face down towards the bottom of the sea. Imagine your lungs filling up with sea water. Imagine your eardrums bursting under the pressure.

That would be better – that would be far better than what is waiting for you in the presence of God if you don't get your sin under control.

Are you hearing that?

Are we hearing that?

Lord God Jesus – help us to hear that.

And also Lord, help us to love.

iv. Love

It's love, ultimately that will make us do all of this. Love for each other, love for our little ones, love for the lost and love for Christ. Because when we sin – when we let sin go unchallenged in ourselves and in our church – the name of Christ is blasphemed among the nations, you know that right? Our neighbours believe they have evidence now NOT to believe the Gospel. Our kids believe they have evidence now for the unreality of grace. Our sin NULLIFIES our witness and obscures the beauty and glory of Jesus Christ – that is what is ultimately at stake – and therefore it is LOVE - LOVE for the lost, LOVE for our little ones and LOVE for our Savior – that will motivate us, that will help us do what is necessary here to build the sort of radical Christian community that is being called for in this impossible text.

So – help us Lord! Make us humble, give us courage, remind us of the stakes and fill our hearts with LOVE we ask now in Jesus' name, amen.

Amen, Pastor Jody, will you come and lead us?