Luke 17:10 So also you, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants. We have only done what we were supposed to do.

This is again one of those awesome texts of God’s Word that we need to make sure we pay close attention to. What we have before us is Jesus, the Savior of the world, speaking to those who are his disciples. And yet, though they are nearing the end of his earthly ministry and will soon find Jesus hanging on the cross it is clear that they still don’t get what Jesus is all about. I think all of us wrestle with this.

I am going to guess that as we look at the words of what Jesus says here, most of us would have to say, “I don’t get what he is talking about.” He is talking about faith and issues of faith. I can at least say that his disciples on this day at least got that much. They got it badly, but they at least got that much. Let’s look at the lessons of our text and contemplate them under the theme: **FAITH LESSONS.**

What is the first lesson? That is found in our opening words. Jesus says this: **“Jesus said to his disciples, “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! 2It would be better for that person if a millstone would be hung around his neck and he would be thrown into the sea than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. 3Watch yourselves.”**

Here is the first reality lesson. Jesus makes it clear that temptations to sin are sure to come. By the way, if I were to give you the raw translation of this opening line it would say, **“It is impossible for temptations not to come.”** Does that shock you? It shouldn’t. Fact is, if you are a child of God and an heir of eternal life you can absolutely count on the fact that you are in the gun sights of Satan. He is coming after you. He is out to hurt and harm you, to find some way, any way to harm and ultimately to destroy your soul. Satan does not want you to believe in Jesus. Satan wants your soul lost to Jesus. To that aim, Satan will throw at you temptation after temptation. Everything and anything he can, from everyone and anyone he can! His goal is to destroy, eternally destroy your soul!

To help you grasp that all the more please note the word we have translated as “temptations.” Fantastic word. In actuality the base meaning of the word is “trap stick.” What is a trap stick? Think of the little stick that holds back the spring on a mouse trap. Or think of the simpler trap, with a box and that stick holding up the box that will get pulled out and the box will fall on the unsuspecting animal. Today, I suppose you could even speak about the “trip wire” that’s going to set off the trap or explosion and harm you. What it boils down to is that these “temptations” these trap sticks set off the trap that will lead to death. That is what is being spoken of. In other words, we are speaking of sins that will clearly and absolutely lead to your denial and rejection of Jesus.

Those temptations will come from Satan, there is no doubt. But notice the other warning given here. Souls are precious. It is bad enough when Satan and his company of demons is out there laying the traps, but notice Jesus gives a more personal warning: **“But woe to the one through whom they come!”** Jesus is warning us to take sin and its consequences seriously. Jesus is warning us to make sure we are not the cause and reason in any way for a soul to abandon and reject Jesus, for a soul to have its faith destroyed and lost. To make sure you grasp what he is saying Jesus gives and illustration. He says, **“It would be better for that person if a millstone would be hung around his neck and he would be thrown into the sea than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.”**

I always shudder at those words. Jesus has literally just told us that it would be better for us, better eternally for us, if instead of causing someone’s faith to die, we go out and die a rather horrible type of death. I can understand these words. Before you dismiss, overlook, and pish-posh the teachings of Jesus think again. To be a person who has destroyed a soul is not a good position. Before you by your actions approve of, applaud and maybe even vote for sin, again you will want to think of the threat and warning here from Jesus himself. Jesus wants souls saved and if you are out there causing souls or even one soul to be lost, this will not be good. And I do think this isn’t about just children. It is about any soul, any soul, perhaps weakened by the sin of this world, could qualify as a “little one.”

Now I have to tell you I could give a very long list of how people have done that to souls. The minister who by a scandalous life or action betrays the souls he cares for. The parent who for whatever reason shows that Jesus and church just isn’t that important to the children around them. Or perhaps as a parent your child is doing what is godless and wrong and you say nothing, do nothing because that child is more important than Jesus. The merchant who cheats and yet makes a show of church. The politician who supports sin and yet claims Jesus is their Lord. The list here is endless. And don’t think I don’t think of my position in all of this. Jesus says, **“Obey you leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as men who will give an account.”** Don’t take sin lightly. Don’t excuse as needless the truth and facts of God. No wonder this section concludes: **“Watch yourselves.”** As a disciple of Jesus, whether a called minister or not, don’t downplay or soft pedal God’s precious words and truth. Don’t set a death trap for the souls around you! If you think you can play with the facts of faith, well, watch yourself!

Now if you think Jesus shocked his disciples with those words, then look at what he says next. Remember, this is about faith, just like the last section was. He says, “**If your brother sins, rebuke him. If he repents, forgive him. 4Even if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times returns to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”**

I know, you and I want to get all blustery about this. “What do you mean I have to forgive? What do you mean I have to put up with bad behavior and ill manners and wickedness to me?” I want you to note that the text says this person has repented. This person has seen that they were wrong, seen that they have offended the Lord God (for that is what every sin is) and moved by God’s Holy Spirit they have come to you and sought forgiveness. Jesus says, “Forgive him.”

Now I will help you out a little bit here. I will tell you that I don’t think this is the same sin repeated seven times because in truth, such a thought actually goes against what repentance is. Repentance is not only to see your sin but it is also to be sorry for your sin. There is more, repentance also says that I will stop that sin. If you are not working to stop that sin, then you are not repentant. I do think that Jesus is speak of seven separate sins, not the same sin for it just doesn’t fit in with what he says. Repentance is more than just some sort of “oopsy” statement. It is a word that means a change of mind. I think differently and thus act differently.

So the spouse that abuses, I say to the one abused, “Don’t go back until that person gets help and will no longer be a physical threat to you.” That’s repentance. Or the substance abuser, when you say you are sorry, then go get help and stay in that help till you are sober. The same for the liar, the cheat and any other category you want to speak of. Repentance is not just saying “Gee, I messed up” it is getting help and stopping that sin too! In such cases, every time Jesus says, “Forgive him.”

And no wonder. Our forgiveness is to be just like the level of forgiveness that Jesus has given us. We are to forgive as we have been forgiven. It is much easier to learn to do that when you learn the truth and depth of your own sin and the grace and love of God’s forgiveness. And yet, don’t be so foolish as to think that you can do what you want and Jesus will have to forgive you. Jesus forgives because his message of love has changed your heart and life to one where He is God and Lord. Forgive as you have been forgiven!

It is here that his disciples respond. They say, **“Increase our faith.”** They understood that Jesus was speaking of issues of faith, tough issues of faith. They then ask that Jesus give them a stronger and better faith in order that they may carry out his commands and wishes. They want to be disciples who never put a trap stick before anyone! They want to be disciples who are kind and forgiving. But because of Jesus’ response, I think their focus and their idea of what faith is to be compared to Jesus’ understanding, are two different things. Jesus now strives to bring them back to the reality of things, I think specifically to see and recognize where they have gone wrong in thinking about faith.

Jesus says, **“If you had faith like a mustard seed, you could tell this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”** Let’s grasp this lesson first.

If you were standing in front of me and proclaiming your great and awesome faith, know that the very next thing we are going to do is go outside, find a tree and have you command that tree to move. Now if it moves, you have my attention. But if nothing happens, then in truth your faith is not strong, for that matter your faith is not even like that of a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds. I would venture to tell you that your faith might be more in you than it is in Jesus.

Grasp that Jesus is using hyperbole here. He is speaking in such a way so that you will realize that your faith in you is just not adequate. It cannot do and accomplish even the smallest of things let alone something a bit more complicated like commanding a tree to move. But do understand that Jesus, using but a fraction of his power and glory and wonder could move a tree. Jesus could command a whole forest to move and it would. He is God. So don’t get all wrapped up in thinking you got it, you are really a strong Christian unless that faith is totally and absolutely in Jesus.

By the way, do recognize that at least twice Jesus pointed out the great faith of people. There was the Centurion with the sick servant who came to Jesus and said he was not worthy to have Jesus enter his house so if Jesus would just say the word his servant would be healed. Or the Canaanite woman seeking help for her daughter. She told Jesus she would be happy with just crumbs and Jesus complimented her great faith. The other person I think about was the father of the demon possessed son. His plea to Jesus is more where you and I should be. He said to Jesus, **“Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.”** That man, I think had faith right.

So what is right faith? I would say, “Absolute trust in Jesus for everything.” But that means yielding your stubborn, opinionated mind to the wonder and power of God’s Word because we can’t talk Jesus, the very Word of God and dismiss a single jot or tittle from Scripture. Faith is about total confidence in God from beginning to end. I have always treasured Hebrews 11:1 **“Faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced about things we do not see.”** I also think faith is the whole picture, not just the parts you like. And please note that we are told that God gives us faith in accord with his good will and purpose. The simple faith of that person may not be the faith that God has given you. You will be looked at by the Lord according to what He has given you not according to what you think you have. And that was the mistake of the disciples. When they asked for increase of faith they had in mind that Jesus would make them better obeyers and doers rather than those who clung to the promises of God. Faith is about those who cling to what Jesus has done and is!

And that is the point of the last words. I won’t read that whole part again but literally it is about the slave and master. Don’t imagine yourself the master. Because notice the conclusion that Jesus presents to the disciples: **“So also you, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants. We have only done what we were supposed to do.’”** I hope you are as stunned by those words as I am.

We are literally the slaves of Jesus. He is the Master. You are not the master. You do not set the rules. You do not give the commands. The best you can do is imitate your Master and do the best you can in serving Him as he has called you to serve. And note, that even when you do what you are supposed to do the best you can say is: **“We are unworthy servants.”** Just serve. Just do what you can for Jesus. Hear his command and follow. Hear his promises and believe. And never once, ever get the idea that somehow or in some way you, that we, have somehow really earned the applause and thanks of Jesus. From beginning to end, faith is about Jesus. His power, His Word, His victory, His grace, His love, His gift of faith, His willingness to forgive you the sinner that you are.

Faith is hard. Faith is a responsibility. Faith is a way of life. But faith is about Jesus, only and always. We are unworthy servants. We have only done what we were supposed to do. Thank you Jesus, for making me one of yours. Amen.