

Theme: Increase Our Faith: Faith that Delights in Duty**In the name of Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve.**

All through the summer, we've been following Luke's account of Jesus on his way to from Galilee to Jerusalem to fulfill his duty and die for us and for our salvation. Along the way, Jesus has been alternating back and forth between chastising the Pharisees and instructing his disciples about the cost of being his disciples. Today, Jesus once again turns to his disciples to direct them in their duties as disciples. As he does so, he uncovers three of the Devil's deceptions that the disciples might have about their duty to God.

So we'll discover each of these deceptions in a day in the life of a disciple. But it won't do to just to see Jesus addressing those disciples back then; today, I want you picture Jesus turning his head and setting his sights on you, his disciples. Here's an example of what lies behind deception door #1. A disciple wakes up in the morning having a hard time getting out of bed because he was a little too careless about what he had done the night before. But now he's already late, so he doesn't care to start the day with anything to do with Jesus. He meanders through the day on autopilot, technically doing what his job description says, but there's no devotion to it, and certainly not any delight.

He clocks out, goes home, and could care less about his kid's homework or his honey-do list. After doling out a few criticisms about everyone he came across throughout the day, he eats the food laid before him, he pours one up, sits down in front of the TV, and the cold demoralizing cycle starts all over again. Another day done, but think of all the duties he's left undone. His soul is starved from a day without eating from the Lord's table. His wife is starved from a day without affection or conversation, and his child goes another day without feeling a father's love or warm embrace. What will the next day be like for that wife and child? Will they wake up doubting a father's love, and a husband's love? Will they grow bitter about him and whatever his keeping him away from them? Will they see him and all that he isn't and doubt their father in heaven's love?

So Jesus uncovers our first of the devil's deception in a day in the life of a disciple. Most simply we could call it *being careless*; not caring about our daily duty to live a Christian life, and to carry out that duty with care and delight. And that carelessness causes those around us to stumble, or to doubt, or to sin.

Jesus says that those **“things that cause people to stumble are bound to come.”** The Greek Word for things that cause people to stumble is a word we unfortunately become too familiar with—the word *scandal*. It seems that there's a new scandal that breaks everyday that cause all kinds of disgrace and damage to others. But these kinds scandals are hardly ever the result of just one mistake or one lapse in judgement. Instead, they're the result of a little carelessness that grows into a steady consistent stream of neglecting our duty that causes all kinds of damage both to self and everyone around.

To stop that kind of carelessness in its tracks, Jesus gives a terrifying warning. **“Woe to anyone through whom they come. It would be better to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble.”** Ever wonder what a millstone looks like? (Picture). That's a little too much bling for a necklace. But Jesus is not kidding when he says it would be better for such a person to die in the worst way

imaginable than to cause someone else to stumble, or fall into sin, or lose their faith and go to hell. So Jesus uses a millstone necklace to curb our carelessness as he warns each of us. “So watch yourselves.” Don’t get careless.

Then Jesus goes on to the deception that lies behind door #2. Your sister has just done it again, that same thing she always does, the thing that drives you nuts. Now you’re the one left cleaning up her mess. It’s the same thing she’s been doing for as long as you can remember and the last few times you’ve started to believe that she only does it just to get under your skin. Now it’s gotten to the point where you won’t even bother listening to her apologize anymore, as if she could possibly mean it. After all, it’s like the 6th or 7th time now she’s done the same thing. “We’re past apologies now!” You think to yourself. “This time I’m going to let her have it.”

Do you see what lies behind door #2—the devil’s lie that your mercy and your forgiveness is allowed to run out, that you get to be *unmerciful* after a while. “Fool me once, even twice, and fine, I’ll forgive you. But after that? No, that’s where my patience stops. Three strikes and you’re out.”

What does Jesus say? **“If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”**

Last week we finished our series “Hard Truth,” but we could toss this one right in there with it. This is a hard truth, that my willingness to forgive has to be unending and unbegrudging. The disciples realize just how hard this is because immediately they respond with a request to Jesus. **“Increase our faith!”** Forgiveness is hard, especially when the offense is painful.

Let’s move on to the devil’s lie behind door #3. Remember that guy from the first example. Now he’s changed his ways. He springs out of bed, he reads his Bible, he even changes a diaper before he leaves for work. He works hard all day and even remembers to text his wife to check in on her during the day. He comes home on time for a nice conversation at dinner. He helps with the chores after supper and putting the kids to bed. And as his head hits the pillow, he thinks of all the work that’s waiting for him in the morning. “I guess there’s no time for golf! Some thanks I get for a job well done,” he thinks, as if God and everyone else owes him a pat on the back for all he’s done. Door #3 we might call *entitled to recognition*.

How did Jesus put it in his little parable? **“Will the master thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?” (Luke 17:9)** Will the master invite him to come and sit down while the master himself waits on him. No, that’s not how it works between masters and servants. A servant would be foolish to expect something like that. **“So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’” (Luke 17:10)**

Now at this point you might be thinking, “Boy, this isn’t making it any easier for me to want to do any of this duty. This Jesus is starting to sound like a slavedriver, and I don’t want to be a slave. If that’s how you see Jesus, it will be impossible to carry out any of this. But that’s not the Jesus that stands before us on his way to Jerusalem. That’s not the Jesus that sets his eyes on you to encourage you to do your duty.

Let’s get a few things straight about the Jesus that stands before us and what he is like. The one who says it’d be better for you to wear a millstone necklace and be thrown into the sea

rather than cause someone else to go hell is the same one who was on his way to Jerusalem to strap a cross to his back and be plunged into the punishment of hell rather than let you go there and experience it. He's the one who chose a cross so you wouldn't get a millstone. And as he did so he did so he prayed forgiveness for the ones who nailed the cross to his back.

And the one who says you must forgive the penitent sinner seven times in a day is the one who invites you to come and confess your sins week after week and promises to forgive them. Imagine, if our worship service only offered forgiveness on the first and second week of the month and on the third and fourth week, instead of the absolution we just had a note in the bulletin that said, "Nope, not this week, we ran out." That's preposterous. Jesus is the one who insists on forgiving us over and over again. **"If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."** (1 John 1:9). Every week we come with more sins and every week he stands with more forgiveness! That's why we pray in the Lord's Prayer every week, **"Forgives us our trespasses as we forgive those who sins against us."** And Jesus delights to forgive the penitent sinner every time and calls you to do the same.

Finally, the Jesus who asks you to carry out your duty with humble service and delight, without any regard of a reward, is the same one who came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. He's the one who bowed down to wash his servants' feet, and even more than that, he's the one who gave his blood to wash away their sins. And the thanks he got for it? A world that nailed him to a tree. Yet it was for the joy set before him that he endured the cross, delighting in his painful duty for us and for our salvation. That's the Jesus who stands before you calling you to delight in the duty of being a Christian. He's no slavedriver at all, but the merciful Suffering Servant of all.

The disciples got one thing right. When they realize they couldn't do this on their own, they prayed, **"Increase our faith!"** But you know it's kind of strange. Jesus doesn't give them more faith. He calls them use the faith they already had and to rely on the power of the one their faith is in. Even the tiniest little seed of faith which connects you to the all-powerful God allows you to uproot a tree and plant it in the sea! And so too, your faith in the all-powerful God gives you strength to truly take delight in every duty God lays before you. Lord, increase our faith, faith that delights in duty. Amen.