

Matthew 18:7-9 “The Extreme Danger of Temptation”

8.6.17

As you are turning there, I want to share with you a true story I read earlier this week about a pastor and a young man named: Rodney... This is from the perspective of that pastor.

“When I think of special people, I think of some years back when there was a young man in our church who had serious mental disabilities. And I had a special love for him and he did for me. And the Lord had worked in his heart and in the hearts of the people here at our church. We all came to the conviction that even though he was maybe 20-something, he was kind of like 7 or 8 year old in his mind. Yet, he was determined to be baptized, because he adamantly said that he knew the Lord.

Well, I had developed this kind of relationship with him and I remember one day after I preached, I came down and he said to me, ‘Sit down, preacher...sit down.’ I said... ‘Where?’ He said, ‘Right here.’ So I sat right down on the steps right there at the pulpit, and he proceeded to recite to me the 23rd Psalm, which he had memorized. And it was wonderful! And the amazing thing was the fact that he couldn't read. And I asked him how in the world did he do that and for that matter how did he follow me when I preached. And he said, ‘Well preacher, I know the numbers, so when you say verse 7, I find the 7. And when you say verse 8, I find the 8.’

Well, everybody agreed that God had done a great work in Rodney's life. So, I told him I'd baptize him and I remember the night when I baptized him. I said to him before we went into the baptistery, as we stood in the back, ‘Now, Rodney, I just want to be sure. Who is Jesus Christ?’ He looked at me and wrinkled up his nose and said, ‘You mean, you don't even know that?’ I said, ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know that, I know that...I've got that.’ He said, ‘Preacher, I thought you knew that.’ I said, ‘Yes, yes, Rodney I know that, I don't know why I even asked such a silly question.’ So, I baptized Rodney and the church rejoiced! He was so happy!

But I remember only a few days later...and this was such a sad thing. He came to tell me that his brother and some of his buddies thought it would be funny to pour beer down his throat and they got him absolutely drunk out of his mind. And they made a mockery of Rodney. Rodney asked me if he was going to be kicked out of the church because they got him drunk. I told him, ‘No, Rodney...of course not! You were used! It was your brother and his buddies who caused you to stumble.’ Rodney said, with tears rolling down his cheeks, ‘Preacher, I asked the Lord to forgive me. Do you think He will?’ I said, ‘Yes, Rodney...He already has...don't your worry.’ Rodney said, ‘Oh good preacher! Cause I love Him so much.’”

Folks, I had tears in my eyes as I finished reading that true story about Rodney and I thought about this message today and the message from last Sunday about stumbling blocks. You see, Rodney's brother and his thug buddies caused Rodney to stumble and that true story is an example of what Jesus was talking about as He taught His disciples about seriousness of causing a young believer to stumble and sin.

Now, if you were with us last week, you will remember that Jesus is answering a question that's been plaguing the apostles for weeks. They keep arguing about “Who's the Greatest?” And Jesus scolds them by bringing a young boy to his lap...

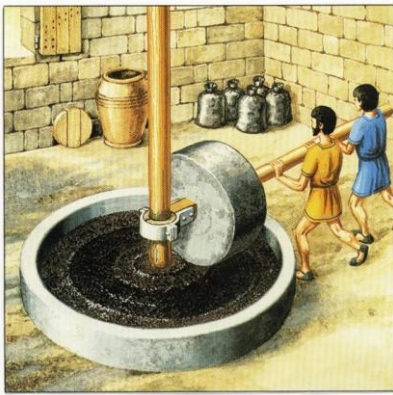


...and Jesus said, “This is the greatest.” **My paraphrase here:** You’ve got to become like a child and humble yourself and turn from your sins...that will make you the greatest...now stop arguing, because you’re creating a stumbling block for the younger believers. You’re supposed to be the ones they’ll look to when I’m gone... But, you’re creating a stumbling block for them with your continual prideful questioning about “Who’s the Greatest?” **And then,** Jesus said the words recorded in Matthew 18, **verse 6.**

Matthew 18:6

6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

You might remember the picture of the millstone?



It was a huge grinding millstone turned by slaves or farm animals.

Church family, do you grasp the seriousness of what Jesus was saying? It is monumentally important that we understand the grave ramifications for those who cause young believers in Christ to stumble into sin. Jesus continues... **See verses 7-9 for our text for today.**

Matthew 18:7-9

7 “Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! **8** And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. **9** And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

Church family, anytime you hear the word “Woe,” come out of Jesus’ mouth, you better take notice, because that’s a pronouncement of judgment. That’s what Jesus said in verse 7. “Woe.” In the Greek it is a word that means *“judgment that leads to grief.”*

You may remember, Jesus said, “Woe to the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, because they would not trust in Him even after He performed dozens and dozens of miracles. Jesus says “Woe” to you. Look at verse 7 again...

Matthew 18:7

7 “Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!

Jesus is telling His disciples that the World is going to fall under judgment because the people of the world lead people to sin. Now, let’s be reminded what sin is, because I’m afraid we might not really have a biblical understanding of sin.

Sin is not determined by the culture, by society, by the government, by Rock Stars, Music Stars, or athletes. Sin is determined by the objective truth of the Word of God. You and I don’t get to decide what sin is. God has already decided that and He’s given us a clear understanding (in black and white) of what sin is. Sin is missing the mark. It’s breaking God’s commands...His laws. Jesus said, “If you love me you’ll keep my commandments.” Don’t ever forget that Jesus hates sin because sin is an active assault against His Father, God. And don’t ever forget this is what sin cost Jesus...



Sin cost Jesus His life...it killed Him.

Church, listen to me... Do you know what I’m afraid of today? I’m afraid that Christians are trying to be their own “determiner of truth” and we’re allowing the world to influence our understanding of sin and what the Bible teaches about sin. We don’t hate sin and what it does to people anymore. We have such a casual attitude toward sin. Oh, please, please, please don’t take your cues about what sin is from Anderson Cooper, or Beyonce, or Justin Bieber and Katy Perry.

Young people, listen...just because a Hollywood star or professional athlete says something is okay, or isn’t a sin anymore doesn’t mean they know what they’re talking about. If it goes against what the Bible teaches, then you’re going to have to decide if you’re going to trust that star...that athlete or Almighty God, the Creator of the universe. Listen, God decides what truth is, not us! And God **gives us a chance to choose to follow Him or to follow the world into sin**. This choice is called: “Free Will.” That’s what Jesus is describing in verse 7.

Matthew 18:7

7 “Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!

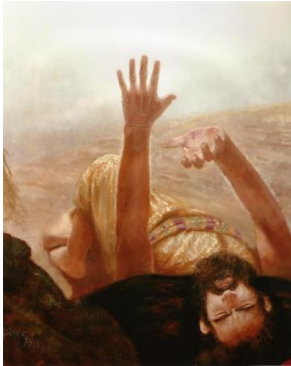
The word, “necessary” in the Greek means: “inevitable” (anagke). The NLT says it that way and it’s really a better translation of the original Greek. Read it that way... “For it is inevitable that temptations will come.” Why? Because from the beginning...all the way back to the Garden of

Eden...Adam and Eve were given a choice whether to obey or disobey God, and that choice is called "Free Will." And you and I get to decide if we will obey, as well. We're not robots...

It's been said, **"Wherever life is free it's hazardous. To give one the option to do good is also to give him the option to do evil." You and I have FREE WILL.**

So let's see if we can understand this... Because we have free will...we can choose to lead others into sin and if we do and we do that to a young believer and create a stumbling block for them, "Woe to you!" Jesus said, *"Woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!"*

Take a look at this artist's depiction...



Somebody tell me who that is? That's Saul, (who would become the Apostle Paul), on the Road to Damascus. He's been persecuting Christians...literally killing them and do you remember how that scene unfolded...

Acts 9:4-5

⁴And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

Now, why did Jesus say to Saul, "You are persecuting me?" Jesus is in heaven, right? Listen, understand this, when someone persecutes one of Jesus' followers, one of His believers, they are persecuting Him! Jesus said, "As you have done it to one of the least of these my brothers, you have done it to me" (Matthew 25:40).

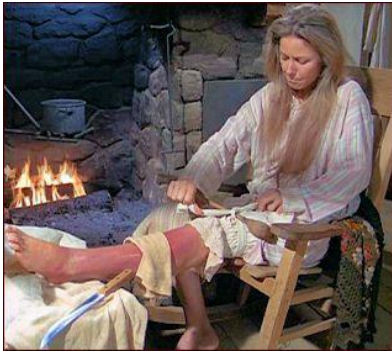
Mom and Dad, think about it this way. Would you rather have someone attack you or your children? You, right? That's how I am. You can say or do almost anything to me and I'll be much more likely to let it go...but, you come after my child...well...that's a different matter altogether. Why? Because we invest in our children. We teach, we train, we love, we care for them and if someone comes after them to cause them harm... oh boy...and that's the point... Jesus said, "Don't you dare cause one of my children to stumble." Woe to you if you do!

Now, how serious is Jesus about this? Watch... He's real serious! He gives three (3) examples:

Matthew 18:8-9

⁸And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. ⁹And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

Now I know some of you might be wondering: “Is Jesus advocating self-mutilation.” No. Not at all! But, some have thought so. I remember this scene from Little House on the Prairie when I was a kid.



Do you remember this? That was Carolyn Ingalls and I remember vividly how her leg got infected and she was at home by herself and she became delirious and out of her head and she ended up reading in the Bible this passage in Matthew 18 and in her confused delirium, the next thing you know she has a knife in her hand, ready to cut off her leg. I remember being so relieved when she didn't go through with it as Charles and the girls arrived back home!

No, Jesus is not saying that we should cut off body parts... He's using what is called hyperbole. Did you remember studying that in school? Hyperbole is when you exaggerate something to make a point. It's when you say, "I'm so hungry, I could eat a horse." That's hyperbole. That's an exaggeration to make a point of how hungry you are.

So, what's Jesus point?

Well, it's simply to demonstrate the seriousness of sin! Jesus is teaching, "You better deal with sin drastically, radically, seriously." He's teaching, that you'd be better off to perform what I call: "the spiritual surgery of repentance," and cut out that sin from your life, than die and go to Hell. Jesus said the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount, do you remember?

Jesus is talking about dealing with lust and watch what He says in verse 27.

Matthew 5:27-30

²⁷ "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. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

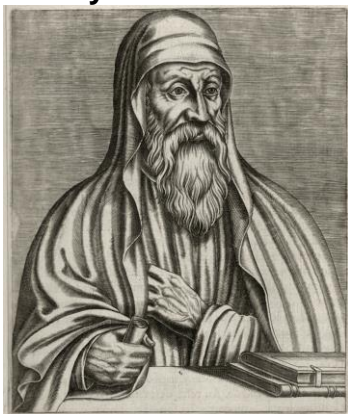
Church family, we live in a day and age where sexual lust is rampant. There's sexual lust of every form and stripe. From heterosexual lust, to homosexual lust and everything in between. And the sad thing is: many people are going to be holding on to these lusts as they enter the lake of fire, having convicted their own souls, because they refused to perform the "spiritual surgery of repentance." Are you living in sexual sin today? Any sexual sin? Oh, cut it out...get rid of it...perform the spiritual surgery of repentance before it destroys you!

You see, here's the crazy truth, it would be more profitable to lose a member of one's own body than to bear the eternal consequences of hell. Listen, Jesus is not talking about Christians losing their salvation because they've caused another believer to stumble. NO! Jesus is saying, if you can

consistently do this and it not bother you, most likely you've not one of His and as we saw last week, He said you better TURN while you still have time. Are you saved? Are you born again?

Listen, SIN IS SO SERIOUS! I'm afraid we've forgotten how serious! The seriousness of sin is that your sin... **that sin you refuse to give up to receive JESUS** will be the very thing that's used to condemn your soul to hell...and you have no one to blame but yourself. You will go to Hell with that sin...and what good will it do you there...as you suffer for all eternity. Satan is tricking so many people. Is tricking you today? Are you being deceived in your sin?

Have you ever heard of this man?



That's Origen, an early Church Father who lived in the second century and he castrated himself, because he didn't want to lust. Guess what? When you read his writings, you'll find that he said he STILL LUSTED. Why? Because sin originates in the mind and it's an attitude of the heart. What's your heart like? Are you living in sin? It will make you miserable. Oh, it's time to get out the surgical knife and perform "the spiritual surgery of repentance."

Think with me now Church... Jesus is seated in Peter's house in Capernaum and He's teaching... Remember the artist's depiction?



He's been teaching them not to offend young believers by their incessant arguing about "Who's the Greatest." Don't forget that's the main theme of His teaching. We, as His followers...as His disciples...don't want to do anything to cause another believer to stumble in their faith. That's the point.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 8 and I can show you how Paul used the teachings of Jesus on this subject to help the Corinthian believers who were struggling with eating meat that had been offered to idols. Paul explained to them that idols have no real existence. They're fakes! So eating meat that's left over and sold in the marketplace at a discount is okay to eat, because the idol to which

the meat was offered isn't real. However, there were some who couldn't fathom eating meat that had been offered up to an idol, even if it wasn't real. **Paul said in verse 7...**

1 Corinthians 8:7-13

⁷ However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸ Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹ But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? ¹¹ And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. ¹² Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

Paul told the Roman Church the same thing in Romans 14:21.

Romans 14:21

²¹ It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

What is your attitude toward your brothers and sisters in Christ...younger believer's in the Lord? Do you care about their conscience? Do you care enough to think about them, over yourself and your own liberty?

Let me ask you another question... Would it bother any of you if you saw me in a restaurant in town having a glass of wine? Sure it would! Even if my conscience allowed me to drink a glass of wine, I wouldn't do it in a million years for the fear of offending any of you...especially your children. They are more important to me than my pleasure! That's the point! That's what it means to deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Jesus. Do you see that?

Church, please never EVER forget that Jesus always makes a way of escape for us when we are tempted in any way.

1 Corinthians 10:13

¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Think about your life today. How is it with you and Jesus? Are you seeking to live like He lived? He sacrificed all that He had for others...for you and for me. Never forget this is what He did for you and for me.



Oh, what a price He paid for you and for me! I close with this thought...

Mom and Dad, when your kids were little and you came to a sidewalk at a busy intersection, like this mom, with her children...



...what do you teach them? Look both ways, right? Sure you did. You'd say: "Kids, look both ways and listen...be very, very careful, because you could get killed if you aren't paying attention." Let me ask you something else. Would that mom risk her life to save her little boy or her little girl if they suddenly pulled away from her and ran out into that street? Sure she would! And so would you for your child.

Listen, that's what Jesus did. He stepped into the oncoming traffic of your life and took your death. Can you see it that way? Oh...we're so numb to this...



We can look at that picture so casually. We can become almost indifferent to what it cost Jesus to buy our pardon. So, maybe it would be a different viewpoint that might help us today.

So, see Jesus standing on the sidewalk with you and you're not paying any attention. You are loose and flippant and full of yourself having not a care in the world...and you step off the curb into the oncoming traffic...but, Jesus shoves you back to the curb... to safety...but, it's too late for Him and He's crushed by the vehicle that was meant for you...taking your death...He died for you!

Listen, some of you are at the sidewalk of life and you're being tempted to be foolish and to step off into oncoming traffic... Stop. Look...Listen...

Oh please hear me...Jesus is here right now and He wants you to know that He loves you and He died for you so that you don't have to live in sin... He stepped of the curb for you so that you might walk free...LISTEN...in a freedom that leads others to freedom...not to sin...not to stumble, but to walk in power...knowing that we've been set free from sin!

Would you see the picture one last time...



Now, STOP, LOOK and LISTEN as Jesus speaks to your heart today!!
