

“Do Your Duty”

We trudge along in our ruts – busy with our schedules, oblivious to what is going on all around us, lulled into complacency. So, Jesus comes to us today to wake us from our slumber – to warn us – to rebuke us – to remind us of our duty – and to show us what is going on all around us.

To His followers Jesus says a most astounding thing. “It is impossible for temptations to sin NOT to come.” The word for these “temptations to sin” is a technical word – “*skandala*” – which is the “little trigger that springs the death trap.”

It’s impossible for these “death traps” NOT to come. They are part of our everyday life. In other words, we live in danger every day. “But WOE to the one through whom they come,” Jesus says. Are you paying attention? Jesus warns us not to spring the trap which causes the death of our neighbor!

“It would be better for [the one who springs the death trap] if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea.” Wrap that huge stone around the neck and throw it overboard – let him sink into the depths of the sea – the place commonly thought to be the place of the demons!

In our lulled complacency – we don’t see our sin that way. It’s “my sin” we think – I’ll deal with it – sometimes, even delighting to play around with it – while telling everyone (including God), that “there’s nothing to see here, go about your life.”

WAKE UP! Your thoughts, words, and deeds are deadly. Deadly for YOU and for your NEIGHBOR! Trudging through life, calloused towards all kinds of immorality, lies and deceit, selfishness and greed – we don’t even realize that we are playing with fire!

This isn’t just a warning to shape up and live a godly life – but an admonition to love your neighbor who is also in danger. After all, Jesus desires their salvation, and yours! He does not desire the death of the sinner. He does not want even one of His little ones to be lost to the eternal fires of hell.

Given this environment in which we live – Jesus not only wakes us up and warns us – He gives us instruction, His life-preserving instructions. “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him ...” Love the brother enough to point out his deadly sin. Rebuke him – not to destroy him – but to warn him, to rescue him!

Now, Jesus prefaces those words by first saying – “pay attention to yourselves!” Rather than being a *skandala* – rebuke yourself, confess your sin – and when you come to rebuke the brother, you come as a fellow sinner.

But there’s more! The real scandal that trips us up and causes us to fall is when He says, “and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

If you had an employee that failed seven times in a day and kept saying he was sorry – you’d be tempted to let him go. If your child kept doing the same thing over and over again – you’d be tempted to punish them until they’d learned their lesson. If your spouse sinned against you continually, and kept saying they were sorry – but didn’t change their ways – you’d question their sincerity, and be tempted to be done with them.

“Forgive them”? Seven times! Seriously? That’s scandalous! And, humanly speaking, that’s impossible.

The apostles live in the same world that you live in – surrounded by *skandala* and habitual sinners. These men whom Jesus will send out to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins to the ends of the earth --- stumble over His words. Ironically, it’s “the apostles” who say “increase our faith.”

These are the same apostles tasked with Feeding the 5,000 and came to the conclusion that it was impossible – we can’t do it, Jesus. Now you’re telling us to forgive this brother? “Increase our faith.” You’re going to have to dump a big load of faith into our meager bucket of faith if we’re going to do that!

The problem is that the apostles don’t understand FAITH. Faith is not a commodity that – if you just had enough – you could do what the Lord desires. The problem is that their faith is in THEIR FAITH their trusting and believing. But FAITH is only as good as the object of faith, that which is trusted.

Looking to themselves and their ability – forgiving the brother is impossible. But a faith that looks to Jesus as the One who forgives – can say the word – and it will be done.

It's not the amount, or size, or strength, or sincerity of faith – but rather, a faith that looks to Jesus to provide, and do, what is necessary. THAT FAITH can uproot the mulberry tree and cast it into the sea. That faith feeds the 5,000. That faith forgives the brother.

Jesus concludes His lesson with the servant who comes in from the field – a servant who simply does what he has been commanded to do. “So also YOU, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”

And what is your duty? To pay attention to yourself, and to your fellow man. To rebuke the one who sins, and if he repents, forgive him ... even seven times in a day.

Dearly beloved, there are those YOU have caused to stumble and fall into sin. REPENT, and look to Christ who forgives all your sin.

There are those whom YOU just cannot forgive for their sins against you. REPENT, and look to Jesus who forgives all their sin, and yours!

That is your duty – but it is only possible – through a FAITH that looks to Jesus Christ alone.

Folks, you live in a dangerous world – a daily struggle with deadly sin. And yet, you live by faith IN Jesus Christ – daily repenting, and being set free by Christ from your bondage to sin.

Indeed, He has done His duty, “for you.” He has taken all your sin into His body, and by His death in your place – He has cast all your sin into the depths of the seas, never to be seen again.

Come now and recline at the Lord's Table – for Jesus gets up to serve you – unwrapping millstones from necks, and resurrecting sinners from death to life. Beloved, you are free – free to live in a dangerous world because you are safe in Jesus – and prepared to live with Him for all eternity. This is most certainly true.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.