



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Luke

Chapter 17

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- After Jesus' dinner at the home of a wealthy Pharisee, where He healed a man on the Sabbath and taught the Pharisees about humility and God's mercy, 14:1-24, He left the dinner and continued to teach the crowds of Jews who were following Him, 14:25-16:15:32
- Turning to His disciples, He taught them about the right use of material wealth, the rejection of the secular world, and obedience to the Law that was necessary for discipleship
- He continues His teaching that began in 14:25-16:31 by turning to address His disciples and the Apostles, 17:1-10



Introduction

Chapter Outline

- Jesus Warns of Offenses 17:1-2
- Forgiveness 17:3-4
- Faith and Duty 17:5-10
- Ten Lepers Cleansed 17:11-19
- The Coming of the Kingdom 17:20-37

Jesus Warns of Offenses 17:1-2



- *Then He said to the disciples,* Jesus, through the account of Lazarus and the rich man, has made it clear that eternity is for real, and no one from beyond will come back to warn us
- It is imperative how we live and show Jesus to others on this side of eternity, because right now counts forever
- In the present condition of the world it is morally impossible, *that no offenses should come*
- Such is the corrupt state of the human heart that despite all the guidance of grace, and the promises of glory, men will continue to sin against God; and His justice must continue to punish

Jesus Warns of Offenses 17:1-2



- But woe to the person through whom those offenses come
- *It would be better for him*, In other words, the fate of a man who is lying drowned at the bottom of the sea is better than if his life would have led to causing *one of these little ones* to stumble
- As a symbol of divine judgment, Jesus uses a millstone
- The same image of divine judgment is also used in Revelation 18:21-22
- In Jesus' time there were the small hand-operated millstones that only weighed a few pounds

Jesus Warns of Offenses 17:1-2



- However, most milling was done by large rotating millstones turned by animal tied to the stone who moved in a circle
- This is probably the type of millstone to which Jesus is referring
- Such a millstone, depending on the size, could weigh several hundreds of pounds
- If this type of millstone was tied to someone who was thrown into the sea, that person would be destined to physical death in the same way a person who leads one of God's children into sin and will be condemned to spiritual death



Forgiveness 17:3-4

- Revenge is natural to man and nothing is more difficult to him than forgiveness of injuries
- But love is the rule here
- We have to be concerned about the salvation of every soul
- We should not allow ourselves to be a stumbling block to those ones weak in the faith
- Neither should we ourselves be obstructed in our salvation way due to others' *stumbling blocks*
- One aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is *longsuffering*, Galatians 5:22, and we need to be able to suffer long with the insults and minor offences that come our way in daily living

Forgiveness 17:3-4



- Ephesians 4:2 says that we should love *with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love*
- Don't be too sensitive; bear with one another
- The command to forgive is also found in the Lord's Prayer in Luke 11:4
- When Jesus mentions a *seven times* forgiveness He is speaking of unlimited forgiveness
- Seven is one of the so-called "perfect numbers" and is symbolic of fullness and completion
- *rebuke him*, In love, when we are sinned against in a significant way, we must follow Ephesians 4:15 as the pattern



Forgiveness 17:3-4

- We need *to speak the truth in love*
- Love isn't telling other people about it; love isn't keeping it inside of you; love is getting it straight with the person who sinned against you
- *If he repents, forgive him*, This is a command from Jesus; there is no other option given, when the person who offended you repents, you must *forgive*
- What do we do with the person who has never repented? Do we forgive them?
- Even if relationship cannot be restored, we can still choose to forgive them on our part and wait for the work of God in their life for the restoration of relationship



Forgiveness 17:3-4

- Verse 4 indicates that we are not permitted to judge another's repentance
- If someone had sinned against me *seven times in a day*, and kept asking me to forgive him, I must not assume that he was not really sincere
- Jesus commands me to still forgive them and restore them
- In this passage Jesus gave us three commands: to reproach the offending Christian brother/sister; forgiveness must be offered if the correction is accepted and is followed by the request for forgiveness; and Forgiveness must be unconditional, *seven times in a day*



Faith and Duty 17:5-10

- The apostles may have realized that the command of a seven-fold, an unlimited—forgiveness, is above their natural ability; they evidently felt their weakness deeply
- So they recognized that great faith in God is needed to get along with people in this forgiving, non-offending way
- The Lord signifies that a very slight real faith, which He compares to the mustard seed, that smallest of grains, would be of power sufficient to accomplish what seemed to them impossible
- The faith that we must have is a faith that has more to do with what *kind* of faith it is than with *how much* faith there is



Faith and Duty 17:5-10

- The roots of the *mulberry tree* were thought to be extraordinarily strong
- St. Ambrose and St. John Chrysostom think the mulberry tree here refers to Satan
- If our life has become an earth, the enemy will plant a mulberry tree there
- With faith we can cast out Satan and all his works from our life, and there will be no place for him in us
- Also, one may have unforgiveness and bitterness that is deeply rooted within him; it may be like one of those trees that send down deep, strong roots



Faith and Duty 17:5-10

- But through faith, Jesus can rip those roots clean out; it can *be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea*
- Faith partially depends on us, but it is a divine and blessed gift
- At the beginning it depends on us; we can either accept it or reject it
- As for making the faith strong and firm this requires the divine grace
- For this reason, because all things are possible with God, the Lord has said, Mark 9:23, *All things are possible to him who believes*



Faith and Duty 17:5-10

- Jesus had just spoken to His disciples about great works possible by great faith
- Here Jesus added some words meant to work against the pride that often rises when someone is used by God
- Jesus speaks of those who *really* serve
- *Plowing* is hard work; it exhausts the strength and endurance of the plowman
- It is hard work in farming and it is hard work in spiritual ministry
- *Tending sheep* can also be hard work, requiring a lot of patience, attention to detail, and a caring heart



Faith and Duty 17:5-10

- Jesus pictured a servant coming in from a hard day of work, either *plowing or tending sheep*
- When the servant arrives home, the master does not compliment, or feed, or serve the servant
- The master expected the servant to keep serving because there was still work to do
- In the context of the preceding words of Jesus, we can say that there are still people to forgive; there are still great works of faith to be done
- These works are hard, but in this mini-parable Jesus gave us the right attitude



Faith and Duty 17:5-10

- His pleasure before our own
- His people preferred before ourselves
- His name before our own name
- The *increase of faith* for which the Apostles asked for, was to come through obedience, outward and inward obedience, to their Master's will
- Faith was to show itself in virtue, and virtue would bring knowledge, and knowledge would strengthen faith, 2 Peter 1:5-6
- They were not to look to accomplishing great things by a strong faith given to them in a moment of time, but they were to labor on patiently and bravely, and *afterwards*, as in the parable-story, *they too should eat and drink*



Faith and Duty 17:5-10

- Of course the master does not thank the servant for such things
- As if he had done him a favor, and what he was not obliged to
- The slave does not ask for freedom from his bondage as a reward for his work
- He only tries to offer all his effort as a debtor, and he waits for freedom as a gift
- The kind of attitude Jesus spoke of is not a false humility
- It is not an admission that we do nothing good or pleasing to God
- It simply recognizes that He has done so much more for us than we could ever do for Him



Faith and Duty 17:5-10

- This attitude understands that our Master has done more and greater things for us than we could ever do for Him
- What He did for us was out of pure *love*; what we do for Him is out of proper gratitude and *duty*
- This is why it is so important for ministers to emphasize what the Holy Bible itself emphasizes – what God has done for us
- When we realize all that God has done for us in Jesus, we *want* to serve Him out of gratitude
- Think of the great work of forgiveness Jesus did for us; think of the great mountains He moved by faith



Faith and Duty 17:5-10

- The greatest works of faith and forgiveness by us are mere *duty* in comparison
- The reward of God's grace is a gift and cannot be earned
- Our good works are evidence of our faith and make us open to receiving God's gift of grace
- There is no room for human boasting as far as our service to the Master is concerned
- If we take the attitude that our salvation is secure because we have done "our part," our self-righteous attitude will be our downfall



Ten Lepers Cleansed 17:11-19

- *the midst of Samaria and Galilee*, Perhaps is just a note of time and place inserted by St. Luke to remind the reader that all these incidents took place
- Or, perhaps to reflect on the fact that the Lord has come to the lost sheep of Israel including Samaria
- Also in Galilee there was a big number of Gentiles, and He wished for the fellowship of everyone
- It was not unusual for these lepers to gather with one another
- They were outcasts from society at large, and had no company other than other lepers – so, they *stood afar off*



Ten Lepers Cleansed 17:11-19

- These *lepers* probably heard of the many lepers who had been healed by the Galilean Teacher who was then drawing near the village
- They did not try to approach Him, but they attracted His attention with their loud sad cry for mercy and begged Jesus to heal them
- It may be noted that there was no accompanying touch as the outward means of healing, and the command was therefore, in a greater degree than it had been before, a trial and test of faith
- As in His other encounter with a leper, He tells them to be obedient to the Law and to show themselves to a priest



Ten Lepers Cleansed 17:11-19

- Jesus is giving them the instruction that a Jew must follow if he was healed of his skin disease in order to be received back into the community and to confirm that He did not come to break the law but rather to fulfil it
- Also to show the Jewish priests an actual evidence of His power to heal and to cleanse
- Suddenly as they went, their leprosy disappeared and their flesh became as it had been in the days of health
- Their obedience in following His instruction lead to their healing



Ten Lepers Cleansed 17:11-19

- Presumably all the men were healed, but only the Samaritan returns in gratitude to thank Jesus
- He is the one who would not be welcomed at the Jerusalem Temple or by a Jewish priest
- A Samaritan would have to go to his own priest who was not recognized as a legitimate priest by the Jews
- His act of prostrating himself at Jesus' feet and giving thanks is a sign that he acknowledges Jesus
- Jesus *missed* the nine who did not return to give thanks
- He wondered where they were



Ten Lepers Cleansed 17:11-19

- It has been suggested that the priests, in their hostility to Jesus, hindered the return of the nine
- Or, perhaps the nine would have separated themselves from the Samaritan as soon as they were cleansed
- Jesus also notices our lack of gratitude
- We can always find reason for gratitude before God
- The nine were rather preoccupied with their healing of leprosy more than with Him who has cleansed them
- There was an extra healing for this tenth leper
- When Jesus said this, He likely meant God's work within the man's heart; the other lepers had whole bodies, but sick hearts



Ten Lepers Cleansed 17:11-19

- The others only got the outward cure, he alone got the spiritual blessing
- Jesus judges the man's cry of gratitude and glorifying God as evidence of his conversion and tells him, *Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well*
- This is the fourth time Jesus has used this phrase to conclude a healing (the sinful woman in 7:50; the bleeding woman in 8:48; and He will use it for the blind beggar in 18:42)
- These ten lepers were a representation of all mankind; not more than one of ten that receive signal mercies from the plentiful hand of God comes to give God any suitable homage

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- Some believed that the Pharisee's question was to mock Jesus
- Others thought it was an intention *to tempt Him*
- Perhaps there were different groups of people
- Some who were really looking for the coming of the Messianic kingdom and their question may imply impatience
- And some who altogether rejected the claim of Jesus of Nazareth to be the Christ and their question may imply insult
- And some were looking for some sign from heaven, to show that He was the promised Messiah
- Jesus' answer was a response to all suggestions

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- They are told that when it comes it will not be in conjunction with any such “observation” of outward things
- According to St. John Cassian, *“The only thing that can be within us is knowledge or ignorance of the truth and the affection for righteousness or sin by which we prepare our hearts to be a kingdom of Christ or the devil.”*
- St. Cyril of Alexandria comments on verse 21 by saying, *“It rests with you and your hearts to receive it. For every man who is justified by faith and the grace of God, and adorned with virtues, may obtain the kingdom of heaven.”*

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- He also added, *“Jesus says, ‘Do not ask about the times in which the season of the kingdom of heaven will again arise and come. Rather, be eager that you may be found worthy of it.’”*
- Some commentators also thought that Jesus meant to tell them that the kingdom was right in their midst, because the King was among them

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- The Pharisees have got their answer
- But Jesus does not allow the point of their question to be lost thereby, but turns now to His disciples in order to give to them instructions in reference to the question raised by the Pharisees
- He wants to prepare them for all that can cause people grief so they can be ready to endure patiently
- *The days will come when you will desire to see ...*, In the long, weary years of conflict that lay before them, they would often wish *to see one of the days of the Son of Man*, or that they could be carried forward to the day of the final victory

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- When Jesus leaves this earth, the days would come when Jesus' disciples – both near and far off – would long for the Messiah's return
- Satan would know how to take advantage of that longing; there would be many who claimed to be the Messiah who would come before Jesus' return
- It is essential that these false Messiahs do not deceive us
- Many false Christs, according to Josephus, appeared about that time, attempting to lead away the people
- Jesus solemnly warned us to *not go after them or follow them*; instead we should disregard them

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- *The lightning* is bright, swift, sudden, and strong
- So our Lord is telling them not to be deceived and allow certain expectations to interrupt them or turn them aside out of the narrow way of patient faith
- His coming will, like the lightning, be sudden, and as the lightning lightens at one end of the heavens, and shines to the other; which is done at once, in a moment, in a twinkling of the eye
- There will be no possibility of mistake then

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- After the mention of His glory, immediately again comes the mention of His passion which must come before the glorious lightning-like advent
- Jesus is preparing them for that
- If He is to come again with glory, He must first go away with shame, persecuted, forsaken, by the generation then living
- There is a tendency in many followers of Jesus to skip the cross and go straight to the Kingdom of God; but the Kingdom of God could not come until the King went to the cross
- We might say that Jesus can only come again in glory because He came first in humility and submission unto death

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- He compared the foolishness of the generation He should come to destroy, to that of the old world, about the time of the flood
- They were completely unchanged by the warnings which Noah gave them, while building the ark
- And went on as usual, following their ordinary occupations, and pursuing their pleasures, both lawful and unlawful, in great security
- They will argue that the sun rose yesterday and on many yesterdays; of course it will rise tomorrow
- The consequence of which was *the flood came and destroyed them all*

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- Jesus introduced another comparison
- The destruction that came upon Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Lot came in the morning, Genesis 19:15-25
- The day before seemed much like any other day to the men of Sodom
- Perfect security will have taken possession of the whole race, just as, on a smaller scale, was the case in the days of Noah and of Lot, when the floods came and the fire, and did their sever, merciless work; so will that day of the second coming of Messiah, with its' bloody and fiery dawn, assuredly come on man when he is fully unprepared

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- The Lord, with this striking description, describes the attitude the people must always maintain, if they would be His servants, towards the things of this world
- His servants must be ready to abandon all earthly *goods* at a moment's notice; none but those who have been sitting freely to these will be able, when the sudden cry comes, at once to through away all, and so to meet the Bridegroom
- The heart must not be on what is *in the house*, but what is *in heaven*
- At that day it is well to abandon all earthly possession, wherefore He call to our remembrance the example of Lot's wife

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- The reminder of Lot's wife - a very familiar story to Jews – is a warning of the danger of the double service, God and the world, and how likely the one who attempted it would be to perish miserably
- Because she disobeyed God and looked back on Sodom – presumably with regret and perhaps with longing – Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt as she and her family escaped judgment
- Jesus here cautioned His followers to not look back at a perishing world, but to set their eyes on the deliverance God sets before them

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- St. Augustine comments saying, *“it can be suitably taken in a spiritual sense. In all our trials, each one must take care not to be overcome or to come down from a spiritual height to a carnal life. He who had progressed should not look back by turning toward the past or failing to reach out to the future. This is true of every trial... How much more this is true for that final tribulation which is to come on the world?”*

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- The sense of verse 33 and the following verses is, yet, as great as the danger will be, people should not seek to save their lives by violating their consciences; if they do, they will surely lose them
- Whereas, if they should lose them for Jesus' sake, they shall be repaid with life everlasting
- But the most probable way of preserving them now is to be always ready to give them up and a distinct providence shall then watch over them, and put a difference between them and other men

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- At the time of the Judgment Day of the Son of Man, humanity will be divided into those destined for eternal life and those destined for eternal judgment, Matthew 25:31-44
- Those "taken" probably refers to the "saved" since those "taken" in the Ark were saved as were Lot and his daughters who were "taken" out of the condemned city
- *I tell you*, The Lord Jesus wished to assure us that the concern about the soul's salvation is usually a hidden matter, that no one knows about except God and the soul itself
- So He presented to us three kinds of people, *two men in one bed*, *Two women will be grinding together*, and *Two men will be in the field*

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- St. Ambrose comments about the word night and say, “He rightly says, night, for Antichrist is the hour of darkness, because he pours a dark cloud over the minds of men while he declares himself to be Christ.”
- Night is also a symbol of tribulation
- The first kind of people is *two men in one bed*, St. Cyril of Alexandria says it donate the rich who repose themselves in worldly pleasures, for a bed is a sign of rest
- But not all rich are wicked, so if one is faithful, he will be taken and another who is not will be left

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- The second kind of people is *Two women will be grinding together*, imply the poor and oppressed
- Not all poor and oppressed are good, so some may have carried the burden of poverty courageously and living a life of thanksgiving while others may have not
- The good will be taken and the unfaithful will be left
- Third kind of people is *Two men will be in the field* represent according to St. Augustine those who labor in the ministry of the Church as in the field of God
- The same some of these servants are faithful and will be taken and others are not and they will be left behind

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- *“Where, Lord?”*, This question our Lord declines to answer
- The disciples were still unable to grasp the full meaning of their Master's words when He spoke of His second advent
- *“Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.”*, This is a difficult statement
- Some commentators both ancient and modern have interpreted ‘the body’ to mean Christ, and ‘the eagles’ His gathering Saints
- St. Cyril of Alexandria agrees with this interpretation
- He says, “As when a dead body is thrown away, all the birds which feed on human flesh flock to it, so when the Son of man shall come, all the eagles, that is the saints, shall haste to meet Him.”

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- St. Ambrose says, “The souls of the righteous are compared with eagles, because they seek the heights, leave the depths behind, and reportedly reach a great age. David also says to his soul, ‘Your youth will be renewed like that of an eagle.’”
- He believes that the eagles around the body are Mary of Cleopas, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the Lord, and the assembly of the apostles around the Lord’s tomb
- He also says, that the body is also the church in which we are renewed in the spirit through the grace of baptism, and the weaknesses of old age are restored for ages of new life

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- As for the body, it is this about whom was said (John 6: 55) “My body is true food”; round it the eagles fly with the wings of the Spirit
- These eagles are those who believe that Jesus has come in the flesh, 1 John 4: 2
- Some say that the body is Christ and the eagles are the believers who will be saved through His sacrifice and nourished by the Body, 1 Corinthians 11:24 of the resurrected Christ

The Coming of the Kingdom

17: 20-37



- Other interpretations say that if Christ was referring primarily and chiefly to Jerusalem, it would be easy to explain "the body" to be the corrupt city, "the eagles" the ministers of God's punishment, especially the Roman armies, whose standards bore the image of this bird of prey
- Some regard the sentence as altogether parallel to the preceding verse, expressing in metaphor that which was there described in verses 34-36 in more direct terms, namely that all men shall assemble to the place where Christ shall gather them to be judged, as *eagles gather round a body*
- In this case the body is Christ, the eagles are the men to be judged



Discussion

- Who is Jesus talking to in verse 1-3? What two warnings does Jesus give?
- What does Jesus say that would be worse than being the person through whom temptation came? Is this a warning for only those who teach or for every believer? What are ways, besides teaching false doctrine, that a person can be a conduit for temptation?
- Why do we forgive others without limits?



Discussion

- The apostles asked for more faith. What was Jesus' response? Did the disciples need more faith? Or did they need a different kind of faith?
- The Pharisees thought that if they lived a righteous life God owed them good things. In contrast, what is the point that Jesus is making? How does serve 10 as a warning to the disciples? To us? How does this address what our true motivation is supposed to be in serving Christ?



Discussion

- List 3 illustrations Jesus gave of people being separated – 17:34-36 and what they represent.
- Explain the illustration of the eagles, 17:37.