

28. Are you heading in the right direction?

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I get lost easily on the road. As I am getting older, I think it is getting worse. So I bought one of those fancy Global Positioning System – GPS thingies that helps me find the way around in strange cities and highways. Every time I go out of the state, I take that handy GPS with me.

But the problem is not with the GPS, it is with me who doesn't pay attention to the device or assume that I should make turns where I am not supposed to. One time, I had to drive around the same intersection for three times before I found the way to the airport entrance even though I had the GPS. If I had paid attention to the direction that was given by the GPS, I wouldn't have gotten lost.

Just for the side note, I am not one of those men who never ask for directions and insisting, "Christopher Columbus did not need directions to find America and neither do we," or "I don't need no stinky map," or "I am not lost, I have not arrived at the final destination yet." But I ASK. I know some of you men think that I am a disgrace to the macho image of men in general.

The Bible is the Word of God and it is our true GPS – God's Practical Signs that tells us which way to go, what to do and how we should handle ourselves while we live on this earth. The majority of people do not seek the Bible as the manual for their lives. Actually, many people don't even have the foggiest idea which way God wants them to go when they are standing at major intersections of their lives.

In addition to that, there are many roads that lead them to destruction and the people don't know how to detect them because they don't know the Bible.

Hosea 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

As Jesus made His way to Jerusalem, He continued to teach His disciples and prepare them for what He would suffer there. But He was also preparing them for the time when He would no longer be with them and they would be ministering to others in His place. It was a critical period in their lives.

In this chapter, Dr. Luke recorded lessons that Jesus gave His disciples about some of the essentials of the Christian life: how to avoid stumbling blocks, having faith in God, being grateful to the Lord and preparing for the rapture.

A. A WARNING SIGN NOT TO BE STUMBLING BLOCKS

Luke 17:1-4 Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! 2 It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. 3 Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."

The word 'offenses' in Greek is 'skandalon', which means "the bait-stick of a trap, that which triggers off trouble." We get our English word 'scandal' from this. I think that the word 'offenses' should have been translated as 'stumbling blocks' for a better understanding.

Scripture says that each of us has the potential of causing others to go wrong. Each of us, if we're not careful, can become a stumbling block. Jesus gives a stern warning against anyone who destroys the faith of new or immature Christians.

I see three ways we can be stumbling blocks to others:

1) By what we say

James 3:1-2 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. 2 For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

Not only the Bible teachers and pastors, but also all of us who are born-again Christians need to be careful with what we say and how we say it so that we may not be stumbling blocks to each other and, especially, to non-believers.

2) By the way we live

1 Corinthians 8:9 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.

When the Lord Jesus set us free from the bondage of satan and death, we received liberty in Christ Jesus. But at the same time, we should not flaunt our liberty any way we want that it may become a stumbling block to others.

3) By the way we think

Romans 14:13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

Our judgmental attitude can be big stumbling blocks to others who are young in the Lord. Too much grace can be dangerous, but no grace is the first step of being a legalistic.

Have you ever seen a millstone? It's a large heavy circular stone that rests flat on top of another. So serious is this sin that a person would be better off cast alive into the sea, never to be seen again, than to deliberately cause others to stumble and sin.

Sometimes we can have perverted justice in our hearts that the ones who offended us should suffer for a long time before we forgive them. But the Lord is telling us to forgive them if they repent. Our forgiveness gives people a sweet taste of Christ's forgiveness, a taste that will draw them to Him rather than point them away.

B. A SIGN FOR GREAT FAITH IN THE GREAT GOD

Luke 17:5-6 And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." 6 So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

It is not the size of faith that makes the difference, rather the faith in our great big God, period. It is either we believe in God, or do not believe in Him. Did you notice that Jesus didn't grant the apostles' wish? He told them all they need is even a small size faith in God who can do all thing.

Transplanting a mulberry tree is not to show off a person's faith. But it is about following the will of God in spite of impossible situation. When was the last time you witnessed somebody who claimed to have all the faith to transplant a tree from one place to an ocean without touching it? If the Lord tells us to do so, it is a matter of following His command simply and trusting in Him to do it.

To forgive someone who offends us continuously, we need to have faith in God who can minister to that person. It takes faith in the great God to forgive.

C. A CLEAR SIGN OF DOING WHAT WE ARE SUPPOSED TO DO

Luke 17:7-10 And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? 8 But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? 9 Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. 10 So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'"

True servants of Christ should not expect favors from God when they do what they're supposed to do. We can never say, "Lord, I had a loving attitude to others today, so You owe me three blessings and an answered prayer." God does not owe us gratitude. We owe Him! He is not our servant. We are His servants.

D. A REMINDING SIGN FOR BEING GRATEFUL TO THE LORD

Luke 17:11-19 Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12 Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. 13 And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14 So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. 15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16 and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. 17 So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? 18 Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" 19 And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

The Jews and Samaritans would not normally live together, but misery loves company and all ten were outcasts.

Three things I'd like to bring to your attention:

1) Their obedience was the evidence of their faith.

The ten lepers were obedient to Jesus' command and took steps of faith literally to the priests to show their healed bodies from leprosy even though they were not healed when Jesus commanded them.

2) Only one of them remembered to give thanks to the Lord.

When it comes to making prayer requests, we are very diligent and quick. But when it comes to giving thanks to the Lord for the answers to our prayer requests, that is another story. Should I say, we often forget?

3) Spiritual blessings from the Lord outweighs physical ones.

All ten lepers were cleansed from leprosy by Jesus through their faith in Him. But only one of them was saved by the Lord Jesus. The literal translation of "*Your faith has made you well.*" is "*Your faith has saved you.*" It is nice to receive physical healing, but that is nothing compared to having our sins forgiven eternally. We who have come to Jesus in an attitude of genuine thanksgiving that comes from acknowledging who God is and who we are, are not just healed, we are saved.

E. SIGNS TO BE READY FOR THE RAPTURE AND THE SECOND COMING

Luke 17:20-24 Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; 21 nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." 22 Then He said to the disciples, "The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. 23 And they will say to you, 'Look here!' or 'Look there!' Do not go after them or follow them. 24 For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day.

We can just imagine a hostile Pharisee coming to Jesus, and demanding of Him to either "put up" and produce the Kingdom of the Messiah, or to "shut up" and stop claiming He was the Messiah.

The presence and power of God were in Him. Yet the Pharisees were so worldly and carnal that they wouldn't see the truth that Jesus is the Messiah. Like the Pharisees, we sometimes search the skies for signs of God while overlooking His footprints in the sand of our lives. Take the past year of your life, for example. How has God provided for you, protected you, guided you, matured you? Perhaps it wasn't anything spectacular or dramatic, but the point is that God's power has continued to be in your life.

V21 "*the kingdom of God is within you*" could be better translated 'in your midst' or 'among you'.

1) A warning sign against the Messiah imposters

Jesus is giving us a clear warning about the imposter. A good example of that is Jose Luis de Jesus Miranda – a.k.a. Million Dollar Messiah.

His message is basically "freedom to indulge." He teaches that:

- The devil, hell and sin are non-existent.
- Prayer is a waste of time.
- The Ten Commandments (moral or ethical guidelines) are irrelevant.

His teaching is nothing new, but the same old lie from the pit of hell.

His followers believe they are God's chosen people, predestined for salvation, no matter what they do on earth. As such, all other religions' teachings are rejected, believing that all other faiths are false and must be destroyed.

Miranda puts himself above Jesus our Lord. His responses during interviews are startling: "I am greater than Jesus. I teach better than Him. I won't die. Even if you tried to kill me! I will be president of the biggest government that this earth has experienced. I'm going to change the whole world."

Well, what can I say, there are always people – like Miranda, David Koresh, Jim Jones, SunMyung Moon and many, many others who have claimed to be the messiah in every century. The problem is not the people who claimed to be messiahs, but the people are buying their lies hook, line and sinker, because they don't know the Word of God.

The true antichrist will come to deceive the world. It is a matter of time for him to show his all sweet and charming presence known to this world, but not until the rapture of the church happens first.

2) A reminding sign of the rapture

Luke 17:25-29 But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. 26 And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: 27 They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. 28 Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; 29 but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.

In my opinion, this portion of the Scripture gives us a clear explanation of pre-tribulation theory of the rapture. I know that many well-meaning brothers and sisters in the Lord believe that the rapture will happen after the tribulation or in the middle. It is very important for you to have a clear knowledge and theology regarding the rapture, otherwise your study of the end-time theology is nothing more than a gigantic brain spin that gives you confusion and uncertainty. God's rescue for His people comes before His judgement against the world like the two examples of Noah and Lot.

Luke 17:30-37 Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. 31 In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. 32 Remember Lot's wife. 33 Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. 34 I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. 35 Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. 36 Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left." 37 And they answered and said to Him, "Where, Lord?" So He said to them, "Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together."

Like Lot's wife who desired her worldly things in Sodom, many people, even Christians are so wrapped in their worldly possessions that they lose their focus of God's kingdom. If you are ready for Jesus' coming, you would not be concerned about all the stuff you leave behind. Your heart won't be on what you have in the house, but on what you will have in heaven. Is your heart ready to be with the Lord? Are you ready today? If you are not, you will be left behind.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) It's usually not the big things that cause others to stumble, but the little things.

Jokes can be taken the wrong way. If you really want to make fun of somebody, let yourself to be the object of fun. Don't have fun at someone else's expense. Expressions also can be misunderstood. We can thoughtlessly offend someone and not even realize it. That's why it's important for us to pay attention to the small things.

2) Ask the Lord before we take the next road.

The roads we take in our lives are our own choices. It is tempting to blame others for our problems. But God holds us, not our neighbors or our families, responsible for our choices.