

# "The Precision of God's Word"

Text: Luke 17:1-10

**"May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." Amen.**

Dear Fellow Christians:

We are living in silly times – times where particularly obvious lies are broadcast as "truth" on a regular basis, even while we are forced to engage in a one-sided game of politically correct gotcha, where words are all. Remember "sticks and stones"? No more. Now words are said to carry the same destructive force as a nuclear warhead. The rules of this new game are both fluid and grossly unfair. Every day we seem to wake to another imposed regulation as to what we can and cannot say without causing some undefined harm or offense.

Yet as God's children, we cannot over-react, just as we cannot allow ourselves to be caught up in the bitterness and hatred. In a world that has detached itself from God's established morals and standards, we need to continue to "speak the truth in love." Our words need to be measured and truthful, and they need to draw, not repulse. They also need to be precise and clear. That's how God speaks to us in his Word, which means that is how we need to present his truth to the world.

Bear this fact in mind as you read our text for this morning (or any part of God's Word for that matter) and you will discover new depths and insights, for God's Word is precise. God always says what he means and means what he says, and his message to mankind always has as its ultimate goal the rescue of sinners. Our text for this morning is found in Luke's Gospel, the 17<sup>th</sup> Chapter:

**ESV Luke 17:1-10 And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! <sup>2</sup> It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. <sup>3</sup> Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, <sup>4</sup> and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him." <sup>5</sup> ¶ The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" <sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,'**

**and it would obey you. <sup>7</sup> ¶ "Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? <sup>8</sup> Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? <sup>9</sup> Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? <sup>10</sup> So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"**

So far the very words of our God. Note well. No exaggerations, no falsehood, no embellishment. All truth, all the time. In humble acceptance of these facts so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

What a completely different and unique perspective we can gain from the reading of our text just by bearing in mind that God communicates *with* sinful human beings, but he does not communicate *like* sinful human beings. He neither embellishes the facts nor exaggerates the consequences. He does not brag, nor does he use what is false in an effort to communicate what is true. In the concrete terms of our text, that means that it really is *impossible* that **"no offences should come,"** (our text says, **"sure to come"**) and it really *would* be better – literally so – to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around your neck than to offend one of God's little ones.

Think about those two for just a moment. When we use the word *"impossible"* we really only occasionally mean *impossible*. Not so with God. He does not communicate with exaggerations or overstatements. In this case, once we understand that God really, literally means *impossible* here, we can and should move on to explore just *why* such offenses are *impossible* to avoid. So also with the second thought in this text. We tend to read statements like the "millstone" statement as if they meant what we would mean if we wrote them. So we might say something like, *"I'd rather have a root canal without Novocain than to go out with her again!"* but we don't really mean it. So too we read statements like **"better to have a millstone hung around his neck"** and naturally tend to assume what we are really not permitted to assume – that God is exaggerating. Once we get past that fallacy, again, we are free to explore the real truth of the passage. In this case, since it really is true that death by millstone is better, then we turn our attention to just how horrible it truly is, in God's eyes, to harm or destroy the faith of one of God's precious little ones. In God's estimation, a quick and certain death is eminently preferable.

Today's modern game of words doesn't help (where truth doesn't matter but using or not using the right words does). It causes us to believe that no one *literally* means *exactly* what they say in our day-to-day conversations. No one literally hits the books, the showers, the hay, or the road. No one literally keeps his nose to the grindstone, or shoots the breeze, or blows his top. Worse than that, we *always* exaggerate. (Like just now when I said "always.") "*I've literally told her about a thousand times not to do that.*" "*I could literally give you a million reasons why that is a bad idea.*" The real problem here is that that same general mindset is carried into the understanding of God's Word – and that's anything but good. God's Word means what it says. It does not use exaggeration or embellishment to make a point. God speaks literally.

If we keep this in mind as we continue to scan down through our text, and several things jump out at us. God really does mean, for example, that we are to forgive our neighbor his trespass - even if he does the very same thing to us seven times in one day. Nor is God exaggerating when he says that even a very small faith can accomplish extraordinary miracles.

Do we tend to read such things as though God is exaggerating a bit? Almost certainly. As evidence, who among us has ever imagined that he could, with a word, uproot a big old Mulberry tree and have it obey his command to be planted in a nearby sea? Who here thinks that God is exaggerating when he tells us that we will not be tempted beyond what we can bear up under? Who here believes without question that we will one day be glorified as Jesus himself has been glorified – despite the fact that Philipians 3:20-21 tells us exactly that. ***"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."*** These words are literal and true. God is in no way embellishing the facts when he promises such things. Staggering, sober thought, isn't it?

With this as our background, we are prepared to examine the scenario outlined last of all by our Lord in our text for this morning. It is the picture of a servant – a slave really – who returns from working in his master's fields only to serve his master's evening needs before finally tending to his own. The point of the account was undoubtedly to drive home to the disciples the fact that even perfect obedience on their part did not earn them anything from their Master. Even perfect obedience to every commandment of God's Law is supposed to be regarded as the simple, reasonable service of every servant of God. No more, no less. Literally.

Consider that fact for a moment in light of what we know about the perfect truth and sincerity of God's Word. God is not exaggerating here. While we tend to think of perfect obedience to God's Holy Law as a maximum, Jesus is here instructing us to think of *perfect obedience* as a minimum – our simple, reasonable service. Perfect obedience = bare minimum.

Plug that truth into your life in order to gain an ever greater understanding of just what God is teaching us here. Suppose that you are eight years old and you decide to surprise mom and dad by waking up at 5:00 a.m. on Saturday morning to clean the house. The whole house. Very quietly, so as not to wake them, you scrub every floor, clean every bathroom from top to bottom, dust every surface of the house, wash, dry and put away every last dish, do the laundry, and generally make the house shine before mom and dad even get out of bed. (Kids, feel free to try this at home.) Suppose, however, that mom and dad get out of bed, examine your work, but notice that your bed hasn't been made, as required, by the time specified, and you are punished accordingly.

Doesn't seem fair, does it? *That*, precisely, is the problem, and it is *our* problem. We do not think of God's Law in terms that our God allows. We do not regard absolute, flawless compliance as our *reasonable service or duty*. We have this idea that failing in one point can be corrected or justified by serving in another. Doing "most" makes up for occasional failure. That is how Christians sometimes justify their own sin, while condemning it in others. "*I swore like a sailor with a toothache this past week, but I make up for it by being active in my church.*" The thoughts are generally not that crass, but the point is that we have come to regard God's commandments as less than what they really are – a bare and reasonable *minimum* for every single one of his children to follow. We don't really even care to address in our minds the simple truth laid out in our text that we are ***"unworthy slaves."*** ("Slave," by the way, is the best and clearest meaning of the original words used here by our Lord.) We have trouble both with ***"slave"*** (we'd prefer to think of ourselves as *servants*) and with ***"unworthy"*** (we'd prefer something a bit softer, more complimentary, like *"trusted."*) *"Trusted servants"* sounds much better than *"Unworthy slaves."* God's Word doesn't deal in half-truths or hyperbole. God's Word says what it means and means what it says, which here means we need to wrap our minds around ***"unworthy slaves."*** Talk about politically incorrect.

What do you suppose would happen if our society, including you and me, would really come to grips with the fact that perfect obedience to God's commandments is our *minimum standard of conduct*? What

would happen if we would learn to regard even what we might consider an especially magnanimous act on our part as simply part of that which is always expected of us? What if we could truly learn to look at ourselves as "**unworthy slaves**"? Perhaps then we would finally look with open honesty into the mirror of God's Holy Law, and see ourselves as we really are – thoroughly sinful human beings with absolutely no inherent goodness or natural redeeming qualities.

Better still, then also the message of the Good News that we have a Savior in Jesus Christ would break upon the beleaguered heart like the sun breaking through the clouds after days of cold, clouds, and snowy rain. Who then could possibly find the message of a Redeemer to be boring or uneventful? Those who think of themselves as "good enough" don't need a savior. Saviors are for miserable sinners – which means that honestly acknowledging our sins makes Jesus instantly more valuable and infinitely more necessary than anything else in our existence. Once we learn to recognize how utterly we have failed to keep God's holy laws, and just what God expects from each one of us, then how joyfully thrilling is the news that another – Jesus Christ – has satisfied the demands that for you and me were literally impossible to supply. With great precision God's Word tells us it is so.

It was Jesus who adopted the exact attitude he himself mentioned in our text. He is the one who considered perfect obedience as his reasonable service, and counted himself as an unworthy slave of humankind. All this he did so that he might rescue us from the eternal hell we had deserved. With great precision God's Word tells us this too is so.

*That* sort of Jesus is never diminished when we frankly and literally admit just how sinful we really are, and how far short we fall in our thoughts, words, and actions. In fact just the opposite is true. Jesus is enhanced and becomes all the more precious to us. Then it is that we come to realize just how profound was our failure and how perfect was his sacrifice. Nothing else even comes close. How precious indeed is our Lord Jesus Christ – the Master, the Savior of every single human being ever born.

Then too we can recognize the horror of damaging or destroying the saving faith of one of God's children, and how much preferred would be the millstone. How much better to teach God's little ones about their Savior Jesus, and to live our lives as examples they can follow in every regard. What this means is that if you are doing the right thing, keep it up. If you are doing the wrong thing, stop it. This is too important for make-believe. It is too important to pretend that the on-going sin and offense in our lives is unimportant. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Habakkuk 1:1-4 2:1-4** The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw. <sup>2</sup> O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? <sup>3</sup> Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. <sup>4</sup> So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted. ¶ I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint. <sup>2</sup> And the LORD answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. <sup>3</sup> For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end--it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. <sup>4</sup> "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

<sup>ESV</sup> **2 Timothy 1:1-14** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup>To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>3</sup> I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. <sup>4</sup> As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. <sup>5</sup> I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. <sup>6</sup> For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, <sup>7</sup> for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. <sup>8</sup> Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, <sup>9</sup> who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, <sup>10</sup> and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, <sup>11</sup> for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, <sup>12</sup> which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. <sup>13</sup> Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>14</sup> By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – October 6, 2019

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 459 (1-6) *(Red Hymnal)*

"Come, My Soul"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. *(Brown Hymnal)*

## The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

**The First Lesson:** (Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4) We, like the Prophet Habakkuk, ought to be disgusted not only by the sin that we see all around us, but in particular by the sin that we see *within* us. The world around us knows no better. We do – or certainly ought to. Thank God that we are not saved by our works or actions. Instead, as we hear in this lesson, we are assured that the righteous live eternally only by faith in Jesus Christ. God preserve us in that one true, Christian faith.

## The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 100 (Page 35)

**The Second Lesson:** (2 Timothy 1:1-14) Paul wrote 2 Timothy shortly before his execution in Rome. The tone of the Letter is that of a Christian man who faces his own death, but who can do so with confidence because he knows and believes in the One who has died to save him. Pray God that he would give to you the same gifts, asking him to give you a heart and mind that are also filled with Christian hope and confidence when your last hour is at hand. It is right for us to have such confidence, for our salvation is sure in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed *(Brown Hymnal page 15)*

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 338 *(Red Hymnal)*

"Thine Forever, God of Love"

## The Sermon – Text: Luke 17:1-10 *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

**"The Precision of God's Word"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post Sermon Hymn – 353 (1-5) *(Red Hymnal)*

"Lord Jesus Christ, My Savior Blest"

## The Prayers

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 353 (6-7) *(Red Hymnal)*

"Lord Jesus Christ, My Savior Blest"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

## Attendance – Sunday (46) Average (40)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and coffee hour
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Bible Class
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and coffee hour

**CLC News** – Prince of Peace of Loveland has called Pastor Timothy Wheaton. Pastor Wayne Eichstadt is considering the call to ILC. Pastor Rob Sauers is considering the call to serve as third foreign missionary. Pastor David Ude is considering the call to Bethel of Morris. Steven Sydow is considering the call to Trinity of Spokane. A summary of the most recent synodical meetings is available on the entry table.

**Coordinating Council Summary** – You will find a reference copy of the recent meetings of the CLC Boards and Coordinating Council on the mailbox table. Please give this your attention in order to stay current with the work that we are doing together as a church body. Please see the Pastor if you want your own personal copy. You can also access the report here: [www.tinyurl.com/Sept-2019-CC](http://www.tinyurl.com/Sept-2019-CC).

**Christmas Flowers** – Believe it or not, the time is approaching when we need to submit our annual Christmas flower order. Please consult the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table, or see Cindy Ollenburger.

**Joint Reformation Service and Mission Helper Trip** – This year's Joint Reformation service is planned for October 27<sup>th</sup> in Jamestown. This year's speaker is Pastor Neal Radichel. There is a poster on the entry table with more information. The 2020 Mission Helper trip is scheduled to travel to Nepal. See the poster on the wall near the sanctuary door for more information.