

The Strength of Solving Problems

Building Core Strength

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Well, hardly a week goes by without an example of somebody using his or her strength in a way that would hurt another person or another group of people. Last Sunday a man who appears to have been a white supremacist entered a Sikh temple in Wisconsin and went on a shooting rampage killing six innocent people who were there to practice the tenets of their faith. He even entered the temple kitchen and began shooting a group of women who were hiding there to avoid his senseless and sinful wrath.

What would possess a person to use his God given strength to act in such a wicked fashion as that?

Then there was the mosque in Joplin, Missouri that was burned to the ground on Monday, the second fire there in the last month in what certainly appears to be the action of arsonists. And not a good week for religious liberty where people would use their strength to destroy a building that another group of citizens had built to practice their particular religion. Imagine people planning and scheming to burn somebody else's house of worship to the ground. Is that why God gave us strength?

All of this was right on the heels of the terrible shooting rampage in Colorado where a man who was armed to the teeth walked into a premier of the new Batman film and began firing at innocent movie goers. Twelve people lost their lives due to senseless violence which clearly had been planned months and months in advance.

And we could illustrate this all morning with examples large and small of men and women using their God given strength in order to harm others. What a waste of the resources that God has entrusted to people.

Now that brings us around, I think, to our church's annual theme, building core strength, because all of us have been given strength. We have been given physical strength and intellectual strength and financial strength and spiritual strength. That is true in dozens of ways. But the question, I think, is: What is it that guides and governs the way that energy is expended. What directs the strength and activities that are positive and right and honoring to God, unlike the examples that I just cited?

Well, one of the central answers to that question is a doctrine that we don't hear a lot about in American culture. And it is the issue of the lordship of Christ, because if you are a Christian, if you are going to let the Word of God be your guide, welcome to you are not your own master. And so you don't just use your strength any way you want. You belong to somebody else.

That principle is taught in many places in the Bible including 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

“Or do you not know?”¹

Paul asked the Corinthians, because apparently some of them didn't know.

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.²

So the question before the house then becomes: How does the God who owns me want me to expend my strength? And what does he want me to do with the energy that has been entrusted to me? And, frankly, the answers to that question are not always easy to hear. They are not always easy to follow.

That is why we try to be very careful to explain the gospel to a person completely before encouraging them to become a Christian here.

People fuss at me from time to time, if you can imagine that. And one of the regular fusses that I would hear is, well, why don't you give a public invitation? And that is a fair question. I am not saying that is a right or a wrong issue, but the reason is because so many people in this culture have very little understanding of what it actually means to become a Christian and I am very concerned to put a person in a position where they would make some sort of an emotional decision and mouth a few words quickly without really understanding the nature of the commitment that they were making. We want to be sure that we have plenty of time to open Bibles and ask people questions like: Do you understand that in making this decision you are asking Jesus to be your Savior and your Lord? You are acknowledging that you both need a person to pay for your sin, but also to take charge of your life. There is no such thing as becoming a Christian without submitting yourself to the lordship of Christ.

That is what Paul meant when he said in places like Romans 10:9:

...that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the

¹ 1 Corinthians 6:19.

² 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.³

“...for ‘WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.’”⁴

The lordship of Christ. You are not your own.

Now here is why we are raising this issue this morning. This passage of Scripture that we are about to study, it ends, for lack of a better way of saying it, putting us in our place. It has a rather stark metaphor that is not going to be appreciated by many Americans who like to think of ourselves as the masters of our own fate. But the context of that image is Jesus’ command to people like you and me to use our strength to solve problems with one another. And the language that is going to be used in this text shows how important that issue, solving issues with one another, how important that is to our Lord, how important that is to our master, how important that is to our king for us to live that way in our families and in our neighborhoods and our work places to the degree that it is possible and certainly in our church. And when we do that we are going to experience the strength of solving problems together.

With that in mind, please open you Bible this morning to Luke chapter 17. And if you don’t have a Bible with you or you just have trouble finding your way around the one you brought, pull out the one from under the chair in front of you and turn to the back section to the New Testament, to page 61. That will bring you to Luke chapter 17 this morning. So Luke chapter 17 or page 61 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

As I said, we are talking about the strength of solving problems. And I would like to read this important text together and then look for three principles to help us channel our God given strength into addressing the issues that can divide us.

Luke chapter 17 beginning at verse one.

He said to His disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble. Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him."

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and be planted in the sea’; and it would obey you. Which of you,

³ Romans 10:9-10.

⁴ Romans 10:13.

having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink'? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'"⁵

There it is, huh? Don't you love the Word of God? That would have been a good time for a yes. So I will ask you again. Don't you love the Word of God? And don't you need the Word of God? And aren't you really thankful for a pastor who gives it to you?

All right. All God's people are happy about this text, right? Absolutely, because I am happy enough for all of us. And we are talking about the strength of solving problems. So let's divide this up, now, by the argument, the flow of the text. There are three principles to help us channel our God given strength into addressing the issues that can divide us.

It starts right here. Jesus is very straightforward. Problems between people. They are just inevitable. Sometimes individuals think the Bible is just a pious book of platitudes that presents this unrealistic view of life where everything is just a little bit of heaven on earth and people don't have problems or difficulties, blah, blah, blah. Nothing can be further from the truth. The Word of God is a very practical book, because it was written by the person who made us and understands the kind of problems that we all face. And Jesus is really clear in this text. Stumbling block, problems between us, they will come.

I love the original word that is translated in English, "stumbling block." Some Greek words they just sound like what they are. It is the Greek word σκανδαλον (skan'-dal-on). Don't you love that word? σκανδαλον (skan'-dal-on), offenses or snares. And the idea is anything that will trip a person up or anything that will hinder their progression.

It is important, by the way, to note that that statement occurs in other places in the gospels. And it is likely that Jesus had discussed this topic at multiple ways and multiple times. But in this particular text, we have to ask ourself the question: What do the snares, these σκανδαλον (skan'-dal-on) in verses one and two have to do with this specific process that is described in verses three and four? How is it that they are related? And the answer is this. What happens when you sin against another person or when they sin against you and specifically whether or not you are going to handle such a situation well? We all know that that is one of the most frequent σκανδαλον (skan'-dal-on). That is one of the most frequent snares that we will ever face.

That is why relationships falter and stumble is because we have this propensity to sin against one another and fail one another and where we are rude, where we are

⁵ Luke 17:1-10.

inconsiderate, where we are mean, we are selfish, for example, in the way we communicate.

James said in James 3:2:

“For we all stumble.”⁶

How many would that be and would that include you?

“For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man.”⁷

And that would not be you and that would not be me.

“...he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.”⁸

So part of where these σκανδαλον (skan'-dal-on) come from. And James went on to say in verse six:

“And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.”⁹

Otherwise, it is a very useful instrument, but ... and aren't you glad that God was willing to talk about that opening? Aren't you? It is inevitable that stumbling blocks will come, these problems and relationships in a variety of ways. And that is especially compounded when we do not respond to such σκανδαλον (skan'-dal-on), when we do not respond to those situations well which is why Jesus went on to say failing to handle these kind of problems between people properly, that is a serious issue.

In fact, I am not sure that what else Jesus could have said in this text to be sure that we get it. He said in verse one:

“...woe to him through whom they come!”¹⁰

There will be consequences for causing someone else to be hindered in their growth. Either because we sinned against them or we failed to properly respond if they sinned against us.

Woe to you. You are part of that. It would be better, Jesus said, if a mill stone were hung around your neck and you were thrown, then, into the sea. You understand what a mill

⁶ James 3:2.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ James 3:6.

¹⁰ Luke 17:1.

stone is, right? That is one of those big stones that was used for grinding grain. It would have a hole in the center of it and some Gentiles used that as a form of capital punishment where a stone like that was tied around a person's neck and then they were thrown in the water and drowned. Can you imagine what it would be like to die in that particular fashion?

You say, "Oh, there would be nothing worse than that."

Oh, there is. And Jesus said it would be better to die like that compared to the consequences of not cleaning up relationship messes properly. In other words, this is serious. This is serious which is why he begins verse three by saying:

"Be on your guard!"¹¹

Just like a soldier who is ready at his post when one of these σκανδαλον (skan'-dal-on) come up between you and another person, you have to be at your post ready to respond to it well. Do your job.

You know, we all shake our heads when people are driving down the road and they are not doing their job, like paying attention. Instead they are texting on their cell phones. Or we shake our heads at ourselves if we ever do that. My dear wife even got me this little thing that I put on my hear shift that says, "Don't text while you drive." I won't say why she would ever have given me one of those, but you want to say, let's talk about other people right now. I feel better doing that. You want to say so someone when you use them do that, pay attention. Pay attention to what you are supposed to be doing right now. Be on your guard.

And that is what Jesus is saying. Be on your guard. Pay attention to what you are supposed to be doing when a σκανδαλον (skan'-dal-on) comes along.

Sometimes that is exactly what God's people aren't doing when it comes to cleaning up messes in relationships that will inevitably occur, because we are distracted. We are not paying attention to the road or the very cavalier attitude toward dealing with relationship messes in a way that would honor the Lord.

We really believe in this as a church. One of the things that my mentor, pastor Gud taught me and taught many of us about problems is they are like guppies. You can either deal with the two you have today or you can deal with the thousand you are going to have next week, because they just multiply and grow that rapidly. So if the Church is going to be heading the right way, instead of wasting all their strength in all sorts of internal fusses, you have got to keep your plate clean. That is just all there is to it. And it is not pleasant, but Jesus commanded this process and so you have to do it. Be aware. Be on your guard.

In fact, this Thursday night we have our monthly pastor and deacons meeting that you

¹¹ Luke 17:3.

elect your pastors, you elect your deacons. And you are doing a great job. You have elected 33 deacons based on their character according to 1 Timothy three and Titus one. And one of the most important things that this church does in a given year is that deacon's election process and you have done a very great job over the year of electing men who take their responsibility seriously.

But then we divide our membership up into deacon's care groups. That is why you have deacons contact you from time to time as ... and just check on you. And I realize some people in America don't like any accountability. You can't be part of this church if you don't like accountability, because you need it and you ought to want it if your head is on straight at all. And I love our deacons. I love the job they do. It is not an easy job. And then three times a year we go through our membership list name by name. I don't know. We have 16, 1700 members here. And we ask questions like: Do we know where that person is? Do we know how they are doing spiritually? Are they growing? Are they serving and are we serving them? Are there any unsolved problems between them and somebody else in this church or anywhere else? And what are we doing to help bring those people together order to solve that problem right away? Because that is just it. If you let problems go in a church it is amazing how much fussing and how much resources and strength can be diverted from things that really matter. And so we insist that we are going to help the members of our church to come together and address problems in the way that the Lord, that the master says that it is to be done whether people actually want that or not.

And when you have that done it is not easy. It is not. But when you get that done, then it is amazing how much of your strength can be channeled toward accomplishing things as a church that matter.

You know, when it came time to have this vote for Faith West, I think that passed by a vote of over 98 percent. That does not happen very frequently in a congregationally governed church. And I am not saying that it would have been sinful or wrong to vote against that, per se, but you are not going to have any kind of unity in a church unless you keep you plate clean, unless you do what the Lord says, unless you go through the hard process of keeping what starts generally as small problems cleaned up before they turn into big ones, before they multiply out of control. And we are getting ready to start a five year strategic planning process January first which will guide this congregation through the next portion of our history. I can tell you right now. Some pastors would be shaking in their boots because everybody would be coalescing around their little thing and then the fussing and fighting would start and it would be a year with a feud. I am not worried about that at all. I am energized big time about that. But one of the reasons is because we believe this. Jesus is the Lord of his Church. And we believe this even when it is hard.

And I would just pause and ask you. Would the way you respond when a person sins against you or when you sin against them, would it demonstrate that you take this matter as seriously as the Lord does? Getting a handle and getting a handle right away. And what some people do instead of following what this text says, that is when they start blowing up. They have got the whole drama queen thing going on. And I have met plenty

of men who function like drama queens when it comes to the way that they handle their anger, when they are mad about something. And that was not a compliment. And, by the way, I know plenty of women who do it as well. No question about that. And so instead of solving problems, instead of getting them and taking them seriously, they waste their energy on drama, to blow up or the clam up, the cold shoulder.

I am not talking to that person anymore. I am taking my ball and going home.

Or I am gossiping. There is something else that happens in churches where instead of going to the right person and getting the problem solved in a biblical way, they start working the Facebook page or they start working the phone directory and on and on and on. And you see what is common in that, but it is blowing up, clamming up or gossiping. What ends up happening is strength is wasted and the body cannot move forward.

I am asking you. When one of these relationship problems come up, does the way you respond, regardless of the side you are on, you sinned or you are sinned against, does it show that you take this as seriously as Jesus says in this text?

Now, how do the next two verses fit into this? It is great hope, really. Problems between people can be solved. Please hear this. There is a big difference between something be challenging and something being confusing. And what I mean by that is this process is crystal clear. Nobody could ever... I don't really know what Jesus means. Oh, yes we do. Step one. If you believe a person has sinned against you go and speak to that person privately. See if a relationship mess has occurred, you have a responsibility to be actively involved in seeking reconciliation. If they sinned against you, you have to go talk with them.

Then you are going to say, "Well, that is not fair. Doesn't the person who sinned against me have a responsibility?"

And what is the answer to that? Yeah, they do. And Matthew five says to that person who sinned:

"Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you..."¹²

In other words, you sinned against them. You should:

"...leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."¹³

And so there is no question about the fact that the person who sinned against you has a responsibility, but that is not our focus right now. What would be ideal is when there is a breach between two people that the person who sinned would be following Matthew five

¹² Matthew 5:23.

¹³ Matthew 5:24.

and they would be on their way to confess their sin to that brother and sister while simultaneously the person who has sinned against would be following this verse in Luke 17 and would be on their way to rebuke that person and they would actually meet in the middle of the road. But even if the other person who sinned against you will not do what God has told them to do, that does not absolve you from your responsibility to go.

And you say, “Well, I don’t think that is fair.”

It doesn’t matter. The issue is: What does the king say? The issue is: What does our Lord say about these very matters?

Now you might say, “Well, what does it mean to rebuke?” Because the text says if somebody sins against me I go and rebuke them. Does that mean I take a baseball bat?

No it is the Greek word *ἐπιτιμαω* (ep-ee-tee-mah’-o) and it means to show him his fault. But please remember this. In fact, you might want to even write it down in your Bible next to Luke 17:3 to rebuke tentatively. So when you think somebody has sinned against you, your responsibility is to rebuke, to go to talk with him. To initiate that process if they won’t, but to go tentatively. Why? Well, there may be things about that situation you don’t fully understand. And so you go asking questions. There it is, not making accusations.

And I just tell you. I have been in this business a long time. It is amazing how frequently that step is missed where people either wait too long. They won’t go and talk to the person who sinned or they assume they know the facts and they start by making accusations. They end up making things a lot worse. You are to rebuke, but to rebuke tentatively. Why? Well, for one reason your understanding of that situation may be incorrect or the other person may not realize he has sinned against you. It may be a matter of just bringing to their attention something they don’t even realize that they did. Or, C, that you may have sinned during that interchange as well and you will also have to address that part of the problem. And those three reasons are exactly why some of God’s people will not take this matter seriously and go and talk with another person in their life that they believe sinned against them, because they already made up their mind about what they think happened. And they would rather nurse their grudge and feed their bitterness with false and incomplete information than risk having to see it from the other person’s perspective. Or they have already made up their mind that the other person isn’t going to respond properly anyway, therefore it is ok for them to skip that step. Have you ever played that game?

Well, I know she won’t ask forgiveness. I know he will just blow up. So I therefore am going to skip the step of obeying what God’s Word tells me to do. Or, if they were honest, I don’t want to be faced with the possibility that I may have sinned as well.

So on the one hand this is very simple. In the sense, simple in the sense that it is very clear, but for many of God’s people they can’t remember the last time they actually took this very step. This is what Godly people do with their strength.

And if you say, “You know what? I am not sure I am going to do that. I don’t even like this part of the text. I am not sure I am willing to do that,” well, what that would say is you are not taking it very seriously which is why maybe we should have had some millstones available at the door on the way out, because if you would say, “You know, I am not going to do that. I don’t care what my king said about that,” here, why don’t you just tie this around your neck and go find a creek or a lake. That is where ... You say, “Well, that would be bad.” Not as bad as the consequences of what we will follow, what we will face for not following the direction of our king.

Now a couple of balancing points. 1 Peter 4:8 does say that love covers a multitude of sins. I would encourage you to be careful about using this, especially if you tend to be a person who clams up. But we are not talking about rebuking one another for ever last little issue that occurs because if we rebuked one another for every last little thing, that is about all we would ever do. There are times when love ought to just cover that, when it is not a habit, when it is not going to be detrimental long term to that person spiritually or to somebody else. But otherwise we have to follow this stuff.

And I would just want to ask you this morning. Are there people in your life who have sinned against you and you have not followed this step? And, if so, what do you think you need to do about that? And if you say, “Boy, I need some help in figuring out exactly what I would say or exactly how it would go,” that is why we have pastors. That is why we have deacons. That is why we have a counseling center. We would be more than happy to talk to you about how to apply this actual text to your situation. But you need to go.

Also this. Flip it over for a minute. What about persons on the other side of the equation? Because I do realize I may be like opening a can of worms here. I probably ought to have my cell phone near me this afternoon, because you may be the one on the side of bring needed to... or needing to be confronted. And so you are about to hear from your wife. You are about to hear from your husband. You are about to hear from your parents, et cetera, et cetera. Well, I just say this to you. A lot about the true nature of your heart is about to be revealed by the way you handle that rebuke. That is why we have verses like this in Proverbs 12:15.

“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.”¹⁴

Or Proverbs 17: 10:

“A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool.”¹⁵

And if you are the person who needs to be rebuked, somebody needs to lovingly come along side of you and talk to you about a way that you have failed, or at least it appears

¹⁴ Proverbs 12:15.

¹⁵ Proverbs 17:10.

that you have failed, how you respond to that is going to demonstrate whether you are wise or foolish. I hope you will be wise.

Now what is the next step in the text? Because there is clearly a process here and the answer is if that person repents, your responsibility is to forgive him. Now it is getting harder. This is progressively difficult in this text. I hope you are seeing that. You say, "What does that mean I have to forgive that person?"

Well, it has nothing to do with forgetting. There may be things that person did against you and even after they ask your forgiveness, you are never really going to forget that. It has nothing to do with whether or not you feel like forgiving them. This is a promise. And it is a promise meaning I will not bring it up behind your back. I will not bring it up to your face. And I will not dwell on it. I am promising you it is over. And that is because our forgiveness is to be modeled after God's forgiveness for us. Thank God for a verse like Psalm 103:12.

"As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us."¹⁶

Aren't you glad for that? Because if God kept a record of everything that we did wrong and constantly brought that up to our face or constantly used that as a means for how he was going to treat us that day, we would all be in big trouble, right? And so he is the model of forgiveness. And there will be people who the fact of the matter is, people have asked you to forgive them. You said you forgave them, but then in the heat of the battle whether it is six months later or a year later or five years later, that is always your trump card. And you are constantly throwing that one back on the table and you are constantly rubbing that in that person's face again, even though they asked your forgiveness and you said you forgave them.

Welcome to that is disobedience to the king. That is why some relationships are so weak and that is why some churches are so weak. It is because people constantly bring things up over and over and over meaning they have not been willing to practice biblical forgiveness.

Now if you are trying to think all this through you might say, "Well, are you saying that forgiveness is conditional?" What is the answer to that? In some ways absolutely. What is the word that precedes he repents forgive him? The answer is: if. And God's Word doesn't teach universalism. God forgives people when they repent, otherwise the gospel would be meaningless. The death of Christ would be in vain.

Well, what about this? Is it ok if I forgive the person but then refuse to have anything to do with them? What is the answer to that? They did repent. So they met the condition. I forgave them. But then I don't want anything to do with you. Is that ok? No, of course not. Remember, God is our model of forgiveness. He would never forgive us for our sin and then tell us to get out of his face. He has a lot more reason to say that any of us than we do to say it to anybody else.

¹⁶ Psalm 103:12.

What about this? If somebody sinned against me, I rebuke them, they ask for my forgiveness. Is it ok for me to make them sweat? Is it ok to make the person wait a while before I forgive them? Have you ever played that game?

Well, I have to pray about whether I am going to forgive you. Is that right? Well, how long can you stand up? Like if we just had you come over and stand, how many hours could you stand before that would start becoming problematic?

You say, “What does that have to do with anything?”

It has to do with this verses.

“Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.”¹⁷

So if you are one of those that I will have to pray about whether I am going to forgive you game playing people, the king would say, “Knock that off,” because that is wasting strength. That is wasting energy.

Now you say, “What about the person, though, I rebuked them and they won’t repent? What do I do then?”

And the answer is in the meantime cultivate a forgiving spirit. That is what Jesus had on the cross. He said:

““Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”¹⁸

That doesn’t mean everybody within the sound of his voice was forgiven. That means he is focusing on the joy of forgiving them when they repent. And also in some situations get other people involved if necessary. That is the point of the church discipline process. If you confront a person about their sin and they won’t... and this includes your spouse, by the way. If they will not repent, that is some time when you need to get other people involved in order to clarify matters and increase the pressure. That is why this church continues to practice church discipline, although it is practically unheard of in this culture anymore.

And you might say, “Well, does it work?” We don’t make decisions on the basis of whether something works. We make decisions on the basis of what does the king say. That is what this church is all about. But by God’s grace there are times when there are positive results. We have actually been having an email interchange this weekend in the sovereignty of God with a person who was disciplined with his church a long, long time again and has now come to her senses and has asked the people in her life’s forgiveness

¹⁷ Mark 11:25.

¹⁸ Luke 23:34.

and now wants to ask her church family's forgiveness. Praise God for that and the strength of this process.

Now you might say, "Well, what if I have taken all these steps but the other person is no longer interested in the relationship? I sinned against them. They rebuked me. I asked forgiveness, but they don't want a relationship anymore or they sinned against me and I rebuked them and they don't want a relationship anymore."

This is a great verse. That is Romans 12:18.

"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."¹⁹

I am so glad for those conditions in that passage. If possible, meaning what? That there are times that it is not. And as much as depends on you, meaning what? You are only responsible for your side of the issue.

Now that brings up another question. If another person has asked you to forgive them, have you done it? Or have you had a cavalier attitude toward this aspect of the process?

And I wonder. I really do. I wonder how many people I will be talking to today who are in this part of the equation. And you have not really forgiven that other person. And, instead, you have nursed grudges. You have developed bitterness and that mess has never been fully addressed. And if that is the case, God would say he wants you to make that right.

Then you might say, "Boy this is hard. This is hard."

We haven't gotten to the hard stuff yet. We haven't gotten to the hard stuff, because what happens if you go through all of this? Somebody sins against you. You do the work of rebuking them. They ask for your forgiveness. You forgive them. And then they turn around and do the same thing again?

You say, "Six months later?"

No. Six weeks later? No. How about six minutes later? What does the Word of God say? The answer is: Be prepared to do this as many times as necessary.

"And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."²⁰

And you might say, "That is impossible. Seven times in one day?"

If we compare this to other places in the Word of God, the point isn't you do it seven times and on the eighth time you can whack him. No, it is as many times as necessary.

¹⁹ Romans 12:18.

²⁰ Luke 17:4.

And if you would say, “Honestly, pastor Viars, I am not sure I can do this. I am not even sure I want to do this and I am not sure I am willing to do this.”

That is why the text ends the way it does. And that is why we began this sermon the way we did. Jesus says it is a matter of lordship. These problems between people have to be solved. And the point of these last verses the apostles questioned faith. Lord, please increase our faith. Jesus says, “Fellows that is not the problem. The issue here is not your lack of faith. The issue is your potential lack of obedience.”

And that is why you have this illustration, whether it offends our sensibilities or not about how a manager would treat his servant and the point is we are the servants. And the question isn't: Do I like what Jesus is saying to me here? The question is: Will I obey my Lord, not just in principle, but in practice? And as I said earlier, that is fundamentally what it means to be a Christian, that Jesus Christ is your Lord.

And I would just ask everybody who is here today. Has there been a definite time in your life where you acknowledge your sin and you have placed your faith and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord? And if not, this would be a great Sunday to do that, to confess that you need someone to pay for your sin and to confess that you need someone to take charge of your life and, friends, listen. Then and only then you have access to the kind of strength necessary to do hard things.

John said this:

“By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.”²¹

Obedying texts like this is part of what gives us assurance of our salvation.

“The wise of heart will receive commands, But a babbling fool will be ruined.”²²

You say, “You know what? There is a whole lot about this I don't like. I can't wait to get in the car so I can start yacking about it.”

You might want to make Proverbs 10:8 your verse for the week.

“The wise of heart will receive commands, But a babbling fool will be ruined.”²³

You know what we are talking about this morning. I think it fits very well into our theme for the year and what I have been emphasizing a lot this summer, this whole matter of building core strength.

²¹ 1 John 2:3.

²² Proverbs 10:8.

²³ Ibid.

“On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul.”²⁴

Do you know where that comes from? It comes from knowing who is in charge of your life. It comes from being able to say every day, “Jesus Christ is the one who is going to be in charge and I am going to operate my life.” There is strength that comes from that. There is strength that comes to us as a church from that. And that is part of what we mean by shoring up the fundamentals. We have got a lot of people attending our church. It is amazing. I am glad for that. The question needs to become: Is everybody who is going to attend here long term going to be serious about Jesus Christ becoming your Lord? There is a difference between counting noses and counting disciples. And we are interested in the latter. It is that important long term. When we think about what we are trying to do over in West Lafayette, that is going to require strength. It is going to require strength. And that comes from men and women in their personal relationships and their families and their neighborhood and the job and certainly in the church house having made a clear decision that matters practically. Here is who is in charge. And certainly when we think about future planning, oh, my, my, my. If Jesus is the Lord we are going to be fine. If not, why would that be interesting?

I want to encourage you to think about whether you have allowed Christ to be the Lord of the forgiveness process and if you have got some steps you need to take even today. I want to encourage you to do that. We have talked about fall readiness. We have talked about being ready for what God has for us in these coming weeks in ministry together. Let's be sure that we have our plates clean. Let's be sure that we have got our problems solved so that we are ready to not have our resources wasted in internal fusses, but we are going to use our strength that God has given us in a way that would help us accomplish the mission he has laid out for us as well.

²⁴ Psalm 138:3.