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### “The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 7”

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#### Matthew 18:15-17

**Now, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him privately what he did to you. If he'll listen to you, you have won him back. But if he refuses to listen, take one or two others with you because it takes two or three witnesses to verify any accusation. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the congregation. And if he refuses to listen even to them, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

In our last lesson, we developed the doctrine that one of the singularly most important tenets of Christian growth is the requirement that we be other-directed. The more self-centered that we are, the less mature that we can become, from a Christian standpoint. Jesus tells us in the passages of Scripture that we covered in the last lessons that to participate in Christianity involves us in something that is larger than ourselves, and being self-centered keeps us from developing the personal characteristics required for Christian maturity. It is certainly more comfortable, from a human perspective, for us to think of ourselves first and others afterwards if at all, but such thinking leads us into a dead end of selfishness rather than the road to maturity.

Jesus Christ did not come to the earth for the self-centered purpose of establishing a kingdom for Himself. Jesus was the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords when He came to our planet, but building Himself up further was not part of His plan. Jesus makes it clear that He was other-directed, as He describes His objective to us in, **Luke 19:10**:

**10 for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”**

The “that which was lost” that Jesus came to save is lost humanity. We have reviewed the story of our being lost so many times that I hesitate to redundantly read anything from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> chapters of the book of Genesis. These verses, in which the man and the woman failed to obey God and lost their place in the Garden, make it clear to us that our relationship with God is completely defined by the admonition in **John 14:15**, in which Jesus says:

**15 “If you love Me, keep My commandments.**

John, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, expands on Jesus' pronouncement, in **1John 5:1-5**:

**1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves [God, which is] Him who begot [Jesus], also loves him who is begotten of [Jesus, meaning the**

people that are saved].

**2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.**

**3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.**

**4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world— our faith.**

**5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**

When Biblical authors write about believing in God, and in His only begotten son, Jesus Christ, they are describing a belief system that requires more than simply believing in the existence of God.

From a Biblical perspective, to believe in God means to acknowledge that God is Our Heavenly Father, and that we have the responsibility to obey our Heavenly Father in the same way that we are commanded to obey the admonitions of our earthly father when we are children under his care. There was no question that the man and woman in the Garden believed in the existence of God, because they hid from God when they felt the impending consequences of disobeying His instructions, but their acknowledgement of God's existence did not mitigate the fact that they disobeyed God. They lost their garden because they failed to follow God's instructions.

Our relationship with God is based upon how well we choose to carry out our responsibility to keep God's commandments. The sweet singer of Israel, the shepherd King David, explains our relationship with God in the 23<sup>rd</sup> and most popular of the **Psalms**, saying:

**1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.**

**2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.**

**3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.**

**4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.**

**5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.**

**6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.**

God is our shepherd, our leader, and our charge is to follow where the shepherd leads, and eat what the shepherd feeds. Adam and Eve forsook their fellowship with God in the Garden, but we have the opportunity to once again have that type of fellowship with God that Adam and Eve did, facilitated by Jesus Christ, who suffered and died in our place to pay the just penalty that we owe for the sins that we have committed.

There was a man who molested a child. His crime was discovered, and he was arrested, tried and convicted of it. The judge sentenced the man to the maximum penalty, twenty-five years in prison.

The man was incarcerated and was a model prisoner for twelve years. On the thirteenth anniversary of his incarceration, he became eligible for parole and applied, hoping to be paroled because of his model behavior in the prison. At his hearing, he told the parole board that his

consistently exemplary behavior was proof that he was rehabilitated and was no longer a threat to society.

Unbeknownst to the prisoner, the parents of the child that he molested found out that he was up for parole. Just as he was completing his testimony before the parole board, the parents of the molested child stepped into the hearing room. The father of the child gave an impassioned plea to the parole board, asking them to keep the man in prison because of the trauma that he had caused the child and the fact that they would only feel vindicated if the molester served the entire term to which he was sentenced. At the conclusion of the hearing, the parole board heeded the plea of the father, and denied the man parole.

A year passed, and the man was once again eligible for parole. He made application and went to the hearing, but when he arrived at the hearing room, the parents of the child were in the room waiting to speak after him. Once again, the father's plea swayed the parole board, and they denied the man parole.

During the fifteenth year of the man's incarceration, the same thing happened, as it did each successive year until the twenty-fourth anniversary of the man's incarceration. When the man went before the parole board during the twenty-fourth year, the father was once again in the hearing, and made the same plea that he had been making for eleven years. At the conclusion of the father's statement, the chairman of the parole board spoke to him.

"Sir, I just want you to know", said the chairman, "that there is no point in your coming to the prison again, because there will be no more hearings. You have swayed this committee into keeping this man in jail for twelve years more that he would have ordinarily served. He has been a model prisoner for twenty four years, and in one more year, his debt to society will be paid, and he will be unconditionally released. He will not be on parole, he will not be under supervision; he will be as free to walk about in the society as would you or I. Although he was convicted of child molestation, he will be able to buy a house next door to a school, if he wishes. There are no restrictions that we can put on him, because he will have served his entire sentence and paid his debt to society in full. His citizenship status will be the same as yours. He will be able to obtain a driver's license, vote and enjoy all other benefits of citizenship, because he has served his entire sentence and paid his debt to society in full. Twelve months from today, he will walk out of the gates of this prison a completely free man, because he has served his full sentence and paid his debt to society in full."

Once a debt is paid, it is no longer owed. Once the debt is paid, that's it, and all penalties based upon the debt are discharged and the debtor is free and clear.

I am here to tell you that if you believe in Jesus Christ, you are like the man getting out of prison. You were a hell-bound sinner, but now, your debt to God for your sins is completely paid. The difference between you and the man getting out of prison is that you didn't actually serve your sentence personally, but Jesus Christ served the sentence in your place. The "A" portion of **Romans 6:23** tells us:

**23 For the wages of sin is death.**

Death is the penalty for sin. Jesus Christ, however, committed no sin. His great miracle working power came from His radical state of godliness. His every thought, word and deed was in line with the will of God.

There were two men in the history of the world that lived in a similar state, although not to the level of the holiness of the Christ. **Hebrews 11:5** tells us about Enoch:

**5 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.**

Enoch did not die, but God took him up to heaven without him dying, because Enoch’s life pleased God. Similarly, **2Kings 2:9-11** tells us about Elijah:

**9 And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?” Elisha said, “Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.”**

**10 So [Elijah] said, “You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so.”**

**11 Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.**

Neither Enoch nor Elijah died, but were taken up to heaven alive because of their righteous lives. Jesus earned the same deathless exit from life as did Enoch and Elijah, but Jesus chose to die to pay the penalty that that child molester owed, and that you and I, who are sinners even as he is, owe as well.

Maybe our sins are not as bad as are those of a child molester, but if you review **Romans 6:23**, you will find that there is no mention of the gradation of sin. In the judgment, God will not judge sins that are terrible differently from sins that are not so bad, because, in God’s estimation, all disobedience is sin. **James 2:10-11** says:

**10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.**

**11 For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.**

At the end of Jesus’ crucifixion, **John 19:30** records:

**30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.**

In this text, the word “finished” is not an exact translation of the Greek. The actual Greek word used is ‘tetelestai’, which is a commercial word which means, “paid”. The literal translation of the Greek sentence that Jesus said on the Cross is ‘It is paid’ or ‘The debt is paid’. The death of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary paid our debt for sin in full, and literally squared our accounts in the history books of heaven, moving us from the book of sin to the Lamb’s Book of Life. **Psalms 103:12**:

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

Did you know that it is impossible to continuously travel to the north? Eventually, you will reach the North Pole, which is the northernmost point on earth. Regardless of which direction you travel from the North Pole, you will be traveling south, not north. If you are travel south continuously, you will eventually reach the South Pole and, from that point, regardless of which direction you travel, you will be travelling north, not south. At the poles, the directions of north and south meet. But you can travel to the east or the west forever and never have to change direction. The east and west never meet. Since the east and west never meet, this passage of Scripture means that once we accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we will never again have to

fear that our sins will meet us in the judgment, because God promises us that they will not, even as the east never meets the west.

However, the fact that Jesus Christ bore our penalty for sin does not eradicate sin.

Sin is no longer an issue for us in the judgment, but sin still exists on planet earth, and God requires us to acknowledge our sins and repent of them. **Hebrews 12:7** tells us:

**7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?**

As well as being our judge, God is also our Heavenly Father. Consider this situation:

A young man takes his father's car out for a spin, and gets a ticket for a traffic violation. When the boy comes home with the ticket, he tells his father what happened. Dad takes the ticket from his son, and when he sees that there is no court appearance required if the ticket is paid within two weeks, Dad writes a check for the amount of the ticket and sends it in. As far as the judge at the court is concerned, the ticket is paid, and the boy never has to face any other consequences as a result of receiving the ticket. However, this is probably not the case as far as the father is concerned. Dad will probably impose some consequences of his own on his son, regardless of what the judge does, because Dad has a different objective than does the judge. The judge is collecting money for traffic violations, but Dad is training his son to be a responsible driver and citizen.

Once we are saved, we are no longer eternally condemned for our sins, because God the Judge is satisfied by the payment of the penalty for our sins that has been made by Jesus Christ. God the Father, on the other hand, has a different point of view.

God the Father wants to train us during this life so that when this life is over and the judgment is past, we can use that which we have learned in this life to live in the next life.

**2Peter 3:10-14** tells us:

**10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.**

**11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,**

**12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?**

**13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.**

**14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.**

Our Christian training prepares us for the next life, and will also enable us to help bring others into the safety of being forgiven by God in this life. If we behave in the way that our Father instructs us, our lives will be attractive and others will want to emulate our example and live like us. God wants to make sure that as many people as possible take advantage of His generous offer of freedom from sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and He expects our influence in the world to increase the numbers. Jesus tells us, in **Matthew 18:12-13**:

**“What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one gets lost, don't you think he'll leave the ninety-nine and go out on the mountains to look for it? And if he finds**



**it, I tell you the truth, he'll be happier over this one than over the ninety-nine who never wandered away. In the same way, it is not your heavenly Father's will that even one of these little ones should lose his life.**

Luke also records Jesus' thinking on this matter, with the concluding statement, in **Luke 15:7**:

**7 I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.**

God the Father is proactive about increasing the number of children that He has. He sent His Son Jesus Christ to pay our penalty, and is preparing us, through His instruction and discipline, to go out to look for other lost sheep in order to increase the size of the flock in the fold. When we find the lost sheep and bring them back, we are to bring them to a state of repentance, as Jesus tells us in **Luke 15:7**. Jesus expands on our work in our text, **Matthew 18:15-17**:

**Now, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him privately what he did to you. If he'll listen to you, you have won him back. But if he refuses to listen, take one or two others with you because it takes two or three witnesses to verify any accusation. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the congregation. And if he refuses to listen even to them, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.**

This process is obviously designed restore fellowship among Christians. The restoral process has two stages, those being, recognition and repentance. In the recognition stage, Jesus admonishes us to tell our brother the nature of his sin because the possibility exists that our brother may not be sinning.

Suppose that you haven't seen your friend Jane at work for several weeks; she's been away on an assignment. This morning you see her at a company meeting, seated on the opposite side of the room. You can't wait till the meeting is over to talk to her. At the end of the meeting, you rush to where she is getting up and happily call to her, "Jane! Jane! It's so good to see you!" But Jane sticks her nose into the air, turns on her heel, and leaves the meeting as rapidly as possible, without even saying "hello".

You stand there hurt and perplexed. If you respond as many do, you'll say, "If that's the way she's going to act, then so be it! I can wait till she comes down off her high horse and wants to talk. Then maybe I'll be ready to do so and maybe I won't!"

But, you see, Jesus won't let you do that. He tells you, in **Matthew 18:15**:

**Now, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him privately what he did to you. If he'll listen to you, you have won him back.**

So you do. Having recovered from the shock, you say to yourself, "Something's wrong here. I've got to get to the bottom of it. I can't have this happen to Jane and me." So you see Jane coming out of the bathroom, and go over and you say, "Jane! What's wrong? I was so glad to see you home again that I rushed over to speak to you, but you stuck your nose in the air and left. What's wrong?"

Perhaps Jane's response will be something like this: "I'm sorry. I didn't even hear or see you! You see, I caught a bad cold on my trip, the meeting was really long, I left my tissues in my office, and I thought for sure my nose was going to drip all over my clothes. That's why I put my

nose back and rushed out here to get some tissues to wipe my nose. I was so preoccupied with all that I didn't see or hear you."

Misunderstandings have wrecked many friendships, and so Jesus tells us to go to those that we think have wronged us, give them our explanation and get theirs. The reason that we have to go to the other person is that they may actually not be aware of our displeasure, and so Jesus tells us to go because His objective for the body is always reconciliation.

The result for which Jesus is looking is that we win one another back to the fellowship. A few weeks ago, we talked about the oneness between God and Jesus Christ. In addition to Their oneness, Jesus tells us in **John 17:20-23**:

**20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;**

**21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.**

**22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one:**

**23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.**

Even in cases in which our brother actually does sin against us, we still have to go to him. People sometime subscribe to the "irresistible impulse" theory, that being, that we only have a limited power over our ability to avoid sin, as our emotions override our intelligence and force us to act sinfully against our will.

Of course, the "irresistible impulse" theory is not actually true, but some people hold onto this theory until they are confronted in the way that Jesus describes. Jesus suggests three venues for recognition, those being, privately, before two or three witnesses, and before the church, so that the sinning person will have the maximum opportunity to recognize that his sin is not the result of an irresistible impulse, but that his sin is the result of a conscious choice.

Jack contacted his counselor. "I was married for a few years, and I divorced my ex-wife because she was a player, and I felt like I couldn't deal with that. We didn't have any children, so I divorced her. I met a lovely, wonderful young lady and got remarried. We've been married for seven years and we have two children. However, I feel like I'm missing something. I don't know why. Lately, I've started playing around on the internet, calling numbers and things. I feel like it is not right, I feel guilty about it, especially since I've been on the other end..."

The counselor interjected, "The actions that we choose to take are either right or wrong, objectively, and how you feel about acting in a certain way has no bearing on whether the action is right or wrong. You are choosing to betray the vows that you made before God. Your behavior is objectively wrong, and that fact has nothing to do with your feelings.

Jack replied, "Well, I know that, and I know that what I am doing is wrong."

The counselor continued, "Everybody gets all kinds of feelings, and some feelings that we get are totally inappropriate. The difference between a good person and a bad person is that the good person resists acting out on the inappropriate feelings. A bad person says to himself, 'Since I have this feeling and it seems to be overwhelming, then what the heck, I'll do it. After all, aren't I entitled to have everything that I want in life?' A good person resists the feelings, no matter how overwhelming or annoying that they might be. The way that we distinguish between

a person with character and a person without character is by evaluating how they resist self-centered impulses.

Jack replied, “Well, I just feel like I’m missing something.”

The counselor retorted, “Of course you’re missing something. Everybody is missing something. There is probably not a person on earth that is immune to temptation, and that doesn’t have these types of fantasies. Listen. Men are designed to be attracted to women, and vice versa. We can’t avoid it. It’s part of our DNA. But we are commanded to act with restraint, and to not act inappropriately regardless of how we feel. The difference between a human being and an animal is that we human beings have the ability to control our impulses, fight our feelings, and keep God’s commandments and the vows that we have made. If we didn’t have this capacity, neither commandments nor vows would make any sense. The difference between a person with character and a person without character is that the person with character chooses to restrain themselves while the person without character does not. Character is nothing more than a choice, and there is no such thing as an irresistible impulse. There are, however, impulses that we choose not to resist.

Jack said, “I feel even worse because I’ve been on the other side and I couldn’t stand it.”

The counselor replied, “But Jack, it is up to you as to whether you are going to resist your impulses or not. You’re talking as though having the feeling, or the urge, or the thought, somehow gives you a certain level of entitlement. I’m trying to tell you that everybody has feelings, urges, thoughts and impulses. Every man has looked at some girl and said to himself, ‘Whoa, I’d like to have that, with no responsibility, with no repercussions, with no consequences, and with no commitment after I’m done.’ The animal male ego likes that idea. However, a real man controls himself and says ‘It is more important that I take care of my family by keeping the commandments and my vows.’ That you have the impulses is totally normal, but if you act out on them, you are a male animal, not a responsible man, and you are a person that lacks character.”

Jack protested, “But the impulses are so strong that I feel like it is impossible to resist them.”

The counselor replied, “Jack, you’ve decided not to resist them. There is no such thing as an irresistible impulse. There are only impulses that we choose not to resist. You choose not to resist them because you don’t want to resist them, because you’re largely self-centered and want to have fun.”

After thinking for a moment, Jack replied, “True.”

The counselor responded, “So if you don’t resist the impulses, you become a bad person.

Jack paused, and then said, “Hmm”.

“And you become a lowlife”, continued the counselor.

Jack replied, “And that’s what I walked away from. I left because I couldn’t handle my wife being a lowlife, and now here I am.”

“Well”, said the counselor, “I guess you still want to get back at your ex-wife. The problem is that you are no longer able to get back at your ex-wife, because she’s out of the picture. You’re with a new wife. Your new wife hasn’t done what your ex-wife did, so you have no reason to get back at her, but you’re revving up to ruin her life. She looks at you as her hero



and trusts you to keep your vows, and you need to live up to that, in spite of your anger and your hurt from your past marriage.

You can't get revenge for what your ex-wife did to you. You can only live well now with your new wife. What you choose to do is your choice to make."

"Okay", said Jack, "Thanks for your insight"

"I wish you well with that", said the counselor.

It is a wonderful thing when our brother repents, and sometimes it takes time and consideration for a brother to decide that he was wrong and needs to repent. The parameters that Jesus outlines allows a brother to save face by dealing directly with the one against whom he sinned rather than a larger group, but also provides for group interactions to increase the pressure to obtain the desired result. Sometimes repentance is not forthcoming, and the Lord's solution is that we separate ourselves from the sinner to increase his incentive to become one with the congregation again, because we can't be one with one another if we publicly refuse to live up to the Lord's commandments.

Our objective as Christians is to learn to be less self-centered and more other-directed, which, if we are successful, will reduce our defensiveness, and increase our ability to admit error and become one with the body once again.

We should always keep this procedure in mind, because, as **Romans 3:23** tells us:  
**23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**

We all sin, and the closer the relationship, the greater the possibility that we will sin against one another. Husbands and wives, children and parents, siblings, friends; we all sin against one another, but now we have a way to resolve our problems and become one once again. We should follow the admonition of Jesus in this passage of Scripture, because as Paul tells us, in **Romans 12:5**:

**5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.**

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