

“ARE WE OPEN TO HIS REBUKE?”

Imagine Meeting Christ #10

Proverbs 1:20-33, 2 Timothy 3:10-17, Luke 17:11-19

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How many of you were disciplined as you were growing up for breaking the rules in your house?

How many of you were corrected by a teacher for a wrong answer or for a wrong behavior? How many of you had to do extra stuff (like laps or pushups) because you were on a sports team and didn't follow the coach's guidelines or did something that the coach disapproved of? How many of you have been reprimanded at work because you weren't following the plan, or got something messed up?

Yep, it's part of who we are to make mistakes and then become rebuked by those above us in order to correct behaviors or attitudes that could adversely impact the lives of many people around us. It's part of learning to live together, part of getting to know a new job, or part of growing more skillful at a sport. We experience rebuke to help us to grow to be better people. Without rebuke, there is no improvement.

Now some would say that any rebuke stymies all creativity and puts an end to discovery in anyone's life. Some would say today that to rebuke a person is to do great damage to that person's psyche to the point of irreversible harm or impairment. Some would even go so far as to say that to rebuke a person is to manipulate them into conforming to only one set of standards. And I guess to a point they could each be correct.

However, rebuke is typically given in order to correct a behavior or an attitude that, if left unchanged, would do so much more damage to a person, than to bring correction to one when that correction could be made easily.

Rebuke works toward the goal of helping individuals attain their very best within commonly established rules and guidelines. Players on a sports team have to play according to the rules of that game to compete fairly. Citizens within an established region must abide by the laws of that region for safety for all. Members of an organization must follow the guidelines of the organization to remain active members. Rebuke works to keep everyone within the established lines of conduct for that group

or activity. If there are no guidelines governing us, then chaos ensues and anything goes. Rebuke works to keep everyone within the commonly agreed upon guidelines.

I remember being harshly rebuked as a child about attempting to put my hand on top of a hot stovetop. That rebuke saved me from much pain and injury. I remember as a child being corrected severely because I was investigating harsh chemicals like ammonia or bleach. That rebuke kept me from sampling those chemicals and saved me from having possible deadly side effects. I remember being sternly rebuked on the archery range as I wanted to collect all my arrows that I had shot at a target before everyone was done shooting for that round. That rebuke kept me from possibly being shot by someone still shooting their arrows.

I call that common sense rebuke, even **loving rebuke**, because it protected me from doing things that could have done horrible damage to me if left unchecked. I don't know how many times in my life I could have been terribly hurt had rebuke and correction not come to me from parents, teachers and friends trying to keep me safe. I am very blessed to be here today because I had folks around me as I was going through life who cared enough about me to keep me safe by rebuking my poor behavior or questionable activity. They rebuked me because they loved me and wanted the best for me. I hope each one of us can tell those same kinds of stories of beneficial correction. Rebuke comes to us out of love, not out of hate for us. It exposes the possible dangers that are unseen at the time, and works to educate me of those dangers before I become hurt. That's the way rebuke is supposed to work in our society.

But let me ask you a question, "Have you ever been rebuked by Jesus?" Are there things in your life that have been contrary to how God desires you to be and you were corrected in your understanding about that particular activity? God loves us enough to bring correction to us before we hurt ourselves by breaking those established guidelines and go about in our own foolish ways.

When we disregard or disrespect the laws of God, that is called sin, and the consequences of sin is eternally damaging to us. God has put rules and laws into place so that we might find our best in life. Yet we repeatedly seem to misunderstand the correction attempts from God trying to help us prevent

that eternal destruction because of sin. When we are rebuked by God, we often call Him harsh, uncaring, or even manipulative. Or worse, we accuse God of limiting our creativity because He wants us to follow some “old fashioned, antiquated” guidelines called commandments. But humans have been on the planet long enough to know that the consequences of disobedience to God’s commands are deadly, physically and spiritually.

So, when we seriously think about the commandments of God, we will see that they are not unjust or manipulative, as some say they are, but rather they are loving, caring rules that keep us safe. Though they fly in the face of some of today’s “leaders” thinking of what is right and wrong, God’s commands are what keep us healthy and safe, enabling us to be prosperous and generous at the same time. Rebuke for disobedience to the commands is God’s way of keeping us within the safe guidelines and helping us to be the best we can be in Him.

So many times God will rebuke us when we stray away from His guidelines in an attempt to bring us back into alignment of those guidelines and help us to see life differently. Rebuke from God is often dramatic and harsh, but many times it takes that severity of God’s rebuke to get our attention and to stop where we are to reconsider our activity or behavior. His rebuke always strives to make us grow deeper in our trust and obedience to Him. But we get so accustomed to our own ways that often we ignore the Lord’s rebuke and staunchly go on doing our own thing, despite any rebuke that might come to us. We determine that our way is right, no matter what, and we blatantly refuse to change. And that’s when we begin to accuse God of not caring, or being hateful towards us rather than loving us.

But listen to God’s love in the Old Testament lesson of Proverbs 1. God speaks through Wisdom, who calls “*out in the streets and marketplaces, calling loudly at the city gates and wherever people come together: ‘Foolish people! How long do you want to be foolish? How long will you enjoy making fun of knowledge? Will you never learn? Listen when I reprimand you: I will give you good advice and share my knowledge with you...’*” (Prov. 1:20-22). You see, God doesn’t want us to remain on our course to shipwreck and disaster, but to bring correction to us so that we might prosper and

benefit from following His laws and commands. God desires our very best, but it takes humility to receive His rebuke and correction. Unfortunately, most often we reject it because of our obstinate desire to live like **we want to** rather than following God's ways. We want what we want when we want it and we won't let God tell us otherwise until often it's too late. We must be humble to accept God's rebuke in our lives or else we miss His desires for us. And only as we humble ourselves to God do we begin to really see God's blessings for us.

But let me take it a little deeper by asking, "Would Jesus feel comfortable in your church?" If He were to show up here today with us, dressed like any other person, would He feel comfortable among us? Would He be welcomed to be here? Would He like what He hears in the conversations among you? Would He be pleased with our worship service? Would He approve of the things that are being taught in the sanctuary and the Sunday school rooms? How about the in the kitchen or in the Gathering area? How about in the ministries that we do outside this building? Or what about the attitudes that are expressed? Would Jesus be comfortable being here with us? My hope is yes, but He might definitely have some changes for us. We might encounter some of His rebuke in order to help us grow stronger in our faith in Him.

Or even deeper, consider this: "Would Jesus feel comfortable in your home?" If He came to your house today for a visit, would He be pleased with what He found? Would He approve of the way you speak to your spouse or children? Would He like what He sees on your TV? Would He be pleased with the things on your computer, or the magazines on your table, or the books on the shelves? You've gotten used to all of them, but if Jesus were to visit your house for the day, would it bring Him great joy and delight to see what you have surrounding you? Or would it bring rebuke from Him in order to make corrections to some of the things going on?

And would you become angry with Him if He confronted you about some of those things? Would you argue with Him, trying to explain the reason why things are the way they are? Would you become so offended by His rebuke that you would not want Him to visit you ever again? Serious things

to consider. Would it matter to you what Jesus thought of the way your life is being lived, or would you just brush Jesus off and keep living your life as if He never showed up?

The importance of Meeting Christ is to allow Him to come close enough to us that He can make changes within us that might bring us back into conformity to God's laws and commands. Jesus desires to make us into new people who are pure and holy **in God's eyes**, acceptable to Him in all our ways. So would we dare invite Jesus home with us? Would we dare let Jesus get so up-close-and-personal that He might offer some rebuke for the things we're doing?

Well, that's the risk we must take if we are to grow in our relationship with Jesus. The Apostle Paul allowed Jesus to change him completely, and he suffered for it because it offended many others around him and they attacked him for being so different than the rest of the people. We heard Paul tell Timothy, *"Everyone who wants to live a godly life in union with Christ Jesus will be persecuted; and evil persons and impostors will keep on going from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived themselves. But as for you, continue in the truths that you were taught and firmly believe...you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed."* (2 Timothy 3:12-17).

So God's desire is that we be open to rebuke and correction so that we don't find ourselves falling off the cliff of worldly living, and finding ourselves in the valley of destruction, but rather following the path of life given to us from God finding righteousness, abundance, joy and peace. And then we find that we are able to do so much more in whatever we do.

So I invite you to listen today to an account of how Jesus brought correction in the life of one that He loved, so that she could find joy and peace in her life. This is Luke 10:38-42. (READ Luke 10:38-42)

Martha was bold enough to welcome Jesus into her home, but it brought her some unexpected

results. I like the way that Robert Rasmussen describes it. She had “intended the day to be a lip-smacking concoction, one that she could savor for years to come. All the ingredients were on hand; rare opportunity, wide impact, great challenge, and a special guest.

“But the recipe had flopped. How could it have gone so wrong? She lay awake in her bed. Her sister seemed to be up, moving about in another part of the house. *I find it hard to care about her just now* (she thought to herself). But Martha lay still, tears soaking her pillow.

“O Lord, why are You so far from saving me? As hard as I try, I seem the least of Your favorites. I cry out to you by day, but You seem not to hear; I cry out at night, and it’s as if You don’t understand. I’m so sorry I got carried away; I lost perspective yet again. You were right to rebuke my agitation; how do I end up ignoring the very One I want to please? I guess I wonder why You gave me so much energy if I can’t use it to bring a smile to Your face? And why did You create me to love a job well done, if it doesn’t bring some pleasure to Your day?”

“And then the Spirit of the Lord reached out to minister to her.

“My dear, dear Martha, I couldn’t love you more; I’d give my very life to save your soul. Please don’t misunderstand the words I said to you today; I can’t tell you what it meant to be invited to your home. The meal you set before me was exquisitely prepared; I enjoyed the way you brought it all together nice and hot. You really have a gift for making people feel at ease, so I bless you for your ministry today. The only plea I offer is that you give Me something more; I appreciate your talents, but I love who you are. In your whirlwind of activity, don’t withhold the better gift. It’s the sweet and precious person behind the things you do.”¹

Jesus didn’t want Martha to miss the time she had with Him. While she had everything planned for a tremendous meal, Jesus wanted her to relax and be at peace with Him like what Mary had done. The meal would take care of itself. Yet Martha had become so distracted by the preparing and serving of the meal that she almost missed the most important thing – Jesus. So the rebuke was not meant to

¹ (Robert Rasmussen, *Imagine Meeting Him*, [Sister’s, Oregon: Multnomah Publications, 1998] pg. 126-127)

condemn her, but to help her to see what was most important for her life. Though she wanted a perfect day where she could show off her hospitality, Martha had almost busied herself out of the chance to find refreshment from the Great Shepherd. She thought that all her work had to be done first BEFORE she could enjoy Jesus' company. Jesus wanted her to focus on Him, and let the meal be less important.

How often for us do we get so laser-focused on what we want to do that we miss what Jesus wants us to do? We get tunnel-vision, seeing only what we deem as the most important, and by being so focused on what we want, we miss what Jesus wants from us. He desires that we take the time to rest and relax in His presence for a while so that we can be refreshed in His Spirit. And when we actually do that, we find that the work we had planned goes so much easier, goes so much quicker, and turns out so much better because we first rested in Him and then went about our duties.

This same misdirected focus affects our lives wherever we are. Whether we are at home or at work, be it at school or on the job site, be it in the board room or in the study group, we so often lose sight of the direction that Jesus wants to take us in that we miss the opportunity for enrichment. We get so distracted about putting out a product, planning the next meeting, learning a new concept or trade, or directing the people whom we are leading, that we lose the bigger picture of what could be done if Jesus were there with us. OR we are so all over the place that we miss the opportunity to touch the life of the family next door who need our assistance. We can be so busy living life to our fullest that we miss the chance to be close to Jesus. We could be so intent upon doing ministry that we miss the time to be nourished by the Savior, ourselves.

Jesus tells us, "Relax! Take some time to be with Me and I will rejuvenate your minds and your bodies so that you can do the work that is essential for My kingdom rather than what is pressing. Listen to Me, and I will show you the best way to live." And the closer we get to Jesus, the more we rely upon His ways and follow His rules, things turn out better than we could ever have planned them for ourselves. Jesus tells us, "*I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for. Then you will call to Me. You will come and pray*

to me, and I will answer you. You will seek Me, and you will find Me because you will seek Me with all your heart. Yes, I say, you will find me...” (Jeremiah 29:11-14a)

So Jesus comes close to us to correct our over-achiever attitudes. He redirects our attention to the things that are the most important. He rebukes us in areas that are misdirected or even dangerous to us and calls us back into focus on Him. He corrects our attitudes toward others. He addresses the time-wasting activities in our lives. He realigns our lives according to the ways of God so that we might not be distracted by the delights and pleasures and obligations and dangers of the world. His rebuke to us is not because He hates us, but very much on the contrary, because He loves us.

We are so gullible to so many strange and dangerous things, and Jesus wants to give us clarity over what is right and wrong. But when we listen to a world that is bent upon living outside of God’s ways, our minds are overshadowed by the selfish desires that we have and we refuse to allow any correction in our lives until the damage has been done, and only a disaster could start us our anew again.

Jesus doesn’t want us to get that far away from Him that disaster is the only thing that can change our minds. He wants us to be open to His rebuke so that we might change our ways BEFORE it’s too late so that we might have a *“future and a hope.”* But that means we must humble ourselves before Jesus, to allow Him to come close to us so that He might point out the dangerous behaviors in our lives and correct us while it’s still easy for us to change. And that means meeting Him, walking with Him, listening to Him, and allowing Him to rebuke our lives so that we might find a blessing from Him.

Let’s pray...Father, thank You for Your great love for us! Thank You for Your great ways established for us! Help us today to invite Jesus into our lives, every part of it, so that He might point out those dangerous and wrong ways within us. Give us the courage to humble ourselves before Jesus so that He might redirect our lives into following Your will and Your way, which is the best for us. Thank you for Jesus’ rebuke in our lives so that we might find Your blessings in us. Open our eyes, our ears, our hearts, our hands, our minds, and everything about us, so that we might find and follow Your way in us. This we pray in Jesus’ holy and precious Name. AMEN.