

Serving with Grace
Luke 17:7-19
Key Verse: 17:10

"So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

Welcome back from the 2008 Purdue International Summer Bible Conference. Through this conference we learned the unconditional love of God. We saw the great work of God through more than 500 people who came forward to answer God's call to world mission as permanent or short-term or "silver" missionaries. As they came to the stage, some were in tears. One husband and wife were surprised to see each other on the stage, and embraced with joy. It was the great work of the Holy Spirit according to God's purpose. We saw that God's vision to reach the world through us is real, and it is burning. God has great hope for us. Now what should we do? Actually, before doing anything, it is most important to have a right attitude. In today's passage Jesus teaches us the right attitude as servants of God. With a right attitude, we can grow up to fulfill God's great purpose for us. Let's learn the attitude Jesus wants us to have.

I. We are unworthy servants (7-10)

In Luke 17:1-10, Jesus gives several teachings specifically directed at his disciples. This is Jesus' short course on spiritual leadership. First, Jesus teaches his disciples to be very mindful of young sheep. The disciples must watch themselves closely that they not cause others to sin. They must rebuke those who sin, and forgive those who repent. They must do this up to seven times in one day. The disciples said, "Increase our faith!" We can understand the disciples. Jesus explained that it is not the quantity of faith, but the quality of faith that matters. Real faith in God, even the size of a mustard seed, has great power. It is because God is the Almighty God. The power of God working through faith can do anything. Jesus wanted his disciples to be spiritual men of faith who do great things for God.

In verses 7-10 Jesus continues his leadership training. Jesus teaches specifically what kind of attitude his disciples must have after working hard for him. Look at verse 7. "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat?'" When Jesus used the word "servant," he quoted the Greek "doulos." This meant the lowest slave, whose will was totally surrendered to the master's service. Usually this kind of servant was born into slavery and lived his whole life in slavery. This kind of servant did hard labor in the fields, such as plowing or looking after sheep. Plowing meant bending over in the hot sun and working the soil until one's hands were calloused and one's back ached. It also meant dealing with stubborn draft animals and digging through hard and rocky soil. Looking after sheep required being constantly alert, for sheep were prone to wander away or fall victim to predators. Last Friday night, Missionary Peter Oh of Kiel, Germany shared how, as a boy, he was a goatherd. He had to fight off snakes that threatened the goats. It required courage, diligence and faithfulness. And the goats never said "thank you."

Such work began early in the morning, perhaps at 7:00 a.m., and went late into the day, perhaps until 6:00 p.m. Breaks were rare; food and water were insufficient. Servants had to keep on working when they were sick or injured. Needless to say, when the servants came in from the field, they were hungry, thirsty, and tired. They wanted a cool refreshing bath, a tasty meal, cold iced tea, and a reclining chair to rest on. In our society, we would give such people at least a month of paid vacation.

However, the kind of servant Jesus was talking about could not expect time off to rest and relax, even at night. Rather, the master would expect him to keep on working, saying, "Prepare my supper. Get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink" (8). For the servant coming in from the fields, it was the beginning of second shift, or night shift, which was a change from field duty to domestic duty. The servant had to hurriedly change from his overalls to a waiter's jacket and bow tie, and put on an apron to cook in. Then the servant had to prepare a savory dinner for the master. After the master was fully satisfied, the servant could eat and drink and rest. The servant was happy when his master was satisfied. The servant found joy in pleasing his master. Though he worked hard, he had a happy heart after a day of hard labor.

Look at verse 10. "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'" Here Jesus tells us, based on the servant's example, what kind of attitude we must have as God's servants. Jesus teaches us three main points.

First, the pure faithfulness of an unworthy servant. The servant described by Jesus always took a servant's position. He served his master faithfully whether he was in the field or in the house. This was the unchanging nature of his relationship to his master. Servants of God should have the same attitude. God is our Creator and Owner. Christ is our Savior who died on the cross for our sins and rose again to give us new life. Because God is our Maker and Savior, we serve him willingly with our lives. We want to be faithful to Jesus no matter what happens. We serve Jesus because we love Jesus. That's all. We do not expect praise from men or any kind of reward in this world. If only we can be faithful to Jesus, that is all. St. Paul expressed this attitude in Acts 20:24, saying, "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."

Second, we must work hard until we have done everything we were told to do. God, our Master, is the one who plans and purposes to accomplish his salvation work on earth. The servant does not make his own plans, but seeks to carry out God's plans. God's servant must listen to God's word until he knows what God wants him to do. Then he must do it with all his heart, soul and strength until it is finished.

At the beginning of this year, we began to prepare the Purdue Conference as our service to God. As Dr. John Jun gave direction, we studied Deuteronomy 6 and 1 Peter 2 in all of the UBF director's conferences around the world. In the Chicago area, from February, we began to have regular worker's meetings with about 50 attendants to report progress and to pray for the work in each department. Each person did his or her best to finish the task they were given as a matter of faithfulness to Jesus Christ. Dr. Jose Ahn worked hard for several months to prepare each world mission night program. European coworkers spent 800 hours to make a 20 minute video presentation. Shepherdess Yvonne Timlin and Dr. Helen Rarick served the world mission report testimony sharers and revealed God's glory. After the conference, they continued to serve international delegates at the hotel and through bus touring out of a willing heart. Pauline Park Jr. gave her heart to preparing world mission booths. She worked so hard that she fainted at the conference. In this way many did their best.

When we prepared in such a way and offered sincere prayer, God blessed the programs abundantly. A Korean medical doctor's family, who were fruitful in Korea came to America almost a year ago. Their new lives have been stressful. They began to fight almost every day. But as they listened to the messages, one by one, the love of God began to work in their hearts. Finally, their hearts were melted by God's love and they could love one another deeply once again. Now their family is happy and they said they have no problem. Ruth Sohn brought two non-Christian friends to this conference through sharing her life testimony with them. As they listened to the messages, their hearts were moved. They confessed their sins and accepted the love of God in Christ personally. In the same way, many lives were changed through this conference.

Now, the conference is over. Does this mean that we stop working for the Lord? No. The mission of God continues until Jesus comes again. Jesus said in Mark 13:10, "And the gospel must first be preached to all nations." Jesus said in Matthew 28:19-20, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." This command is repeated in all four gospels and the book of Acts. Our prayer topic, based on this command, is to send out 100,000 missionaries to 233 nations by the year 2041. God is blessing and answering this prayer, as we saw through those who accepted God's call to mission. These precious people must be equipped and trained. They need prayer support until they can go out to the mission field. And more disciples of Christ must be raised. A little later this month, a new fall semester begins. We must pray for the raising of Jesus' disciples on all Chicago area campuses. We must pray for the pioneering of all American and Canadian campuses through one-to-one Bible study. We must pray for North America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. At this moment we must decide newly to work hard for this task.

Third, we must confess, "we are unworthy servants." Though servants are faithful and hardworking, there is still a danger for them. It is to be proud after finishing the task thinking, "I did it. Without me, it would never have been accomplished. Even God must admire my hard work." One who is proud has fallen into the devil's trap. An example is King Saul. At first, he was humble before God and man. When he was sent on the mission to destroy the

Ammonites, he fought well and won a great victory. Then he became proud. He became relativistic toward God's word. While he should have been carrying out his mission, he stopped to erect a monument in his own honor. In his self-adulation he lost God's blessing. He became useless to God, and a great burden to his people. After working hard, we must learn to humble ourselves. Then we can grow and be used by God continually.

How can we humble ourselves? We can humble ourselves when we look up at God. God is the one who gave us the mission. God called us out of the darkness of sin and exalted us to be his servants purely by his grace. Whatever hard work we have done rests on the absolute foundation of God's grace. Without God's grace, we are nothing. The Apostle Paul was the most hardworking servant. He clearly confessed that he had worked harder than all the others. But he added, "Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (1 Cor 15:10). When we remember the grace of God, we can remain humble before God. So we must confess, "We are unworthy servants" and remember the grace of God.

II. Give thanks and praise to God (11-19)

The second story in today's passage teaches us how to have a right attitude after God has blessed us. Look at verse 11. As Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, he traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men with leprosy met him (12). They had suffered much from their disease. Their bodies were rotting. They had been cut off from society and wandered in no man's land without hope in the world. But they heard about Jesus who could heal men with leprosy. So as he passed by, they stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" (13) They had nothing to offer to Jesus. They simply cried out for his mercy. When Jesus saw them, he had compassion on them. He said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed (14). Their rotting flesh became as new as an infant baby. Each one became handsome, strong and vibrant. It was Jesus' miracle of divine grace.

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him (16). This man realized that it was God who had healed him. In throwing himself at Jesus' feet he acknowledged that his new life belonged to Jesus. This man teaches us how to thank God after receiving his grace.

Look at verses 17-19. "Jesus asked, 'Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' Then he said to him, 'Rise and go; your faith has made you well.'" When Jesus said, "faith," he referred to the act of praising and thanking God. Through this faith, the man reached out to God who had shown mercy to him. Through this faith, he could have a personal relationship with Jesus and have eternal life (Jn 17:3). Those who have faith live in God's blessing continually. The other nine did not have a right relationship with Jesus. Their bodies were healed, but no more. Their ingratitude made them spiritually leprous in the sight of God.

At this moment, we must thank God. We have received so much grace through the Purdue Conference and throughout our lifetimes. When we thank and praise God, he will continue to pour out his grace upon us.

In this passage we have learned what kind of attitude we must have to be servants of God. As we dwell in the hope of God for us, we must work hard for the Lord. We must live humbly before God, remembering his grace. We must thank and praise God for his blessings. Then we can grow continually to be spiritual leaders who are useful to him in carrying out the task of world mission.