

UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS

TEXT: LUKE 17:1-10

INTRODUCTION:

1. We are servants of Christ. The apostle Paul began his epistle to the Romans by saying, “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God” (Romans 1:1).
2. Paul was first and foremost, “a servant of Jesus Christ.”
3. James began his epistle the same way, “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...” (James 1:1).
4. And so did Peter and Jude and John (II Peter 1:1; Jude 1; Revelation 1:1).
5. So tonight I want for us to look at how God’s servants are to fulfill their service. If we are good and faithful, some day our Lord will say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21, 23).
6. But nevertheless, we must, in all honesty and humility, also acknowledge, “We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10).

I. HINDERING SERVANTS (17:1, 2)

1. Here in Luke chapter 17:1, our Lord said, “It is impossible but that offences will come.” Considering man’s sinful nature, it is impossible but that offences will come.
2. And then our Lord gave His disciples a strong warning (17:1-4).
3. Our Lord said that death by drowning would be better than causing these (“little ones”) to stumble (17:1, 2).
4. “Little ones” refers not only to little children. It would also include young believers who were new in the faith.
5. We dealt with this serious subject on Wednesday evening. Romans 14:13 says, “Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but

judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.”

6. First John 2:10 says, “He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling (same word as “offences” in Luke 17:1) in him.”
7. The words “offences” and “offend” (17:1, 2) mean, “a stumbling block, an occasion of stumbling, any impediment placed in the way and causing one to stumble or fall.”
8. It is a serious offense to hinder little children or new believers to attend Sunday School or church services (17:1, 2).
9. I have heard these Scriptures quoted in reference to perverted Roman Catholic priests who molest little children. It has been estimated that over half of the Roman Catholic priests are homosexual.
10. These words could also apply to priests who do not molest children, and that is because they are leading them to hell by their false teachings.

II. **FORGIVING SERVANTS (17:3, 4)**

1. This duty of forgiving offences, even up to seven times in one day, seemed very difficult to the disciples, and this is why they said to our Lord, “Increase our faith” (17:5).
2. “Take heed to yourselves...” (17:3). Forgiveness is important. Our Lord said we are to go to the brother who trespassed against us and rebuke him (17:3). If he repents, he is to be forgiven (17:3b).
3. Matthew Henry has an interesting way of describing the proper way to rebuke. He says, “If you are permitted to rebuke him, you are advised to do so. Smother not the resentment, but give it vent. Tell him his faults show him wherein he has not done well nor fairly by you, and, it may be, you will perceive (and you must be very willing to perceive it) that you mistook him, that it was not a trespass against you, or not designed, but an oversight, and then you will beg his pardon for misunderstanding him.”
4. Ephesus 4:32 says, “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”
5. “Seven times in a day” (17:4) is a lot of forgiving! This means we are to have a forgiving spirit.
6. Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?” and Jesus said to him, “I say not unto

thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:21, 22).

7. Our Lord’s standard for forgiveness is high, but we can do it by faith (17:5). It takes faith to obey God and it takes faith to forgive those who have sinned against us seven times.
8. Warren Wiersbe said, “Our obedience in forgiving others shows that we are trusting God to take care of the consequences, handle the possible misunderstandings, and work everything out for our good and His glory” (*The Bible Exposition Commentary*).
9. Galatians 5:22, 23 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”
10. “Longsuffering” means, “slowness in avenging wrongs.”

III. FAITHFUL SERVANTS (17:5, 6)

1. This duty of forgiving offences, even up to seven times in one day, seemed very difficult to the disciples, and so they said to the Lord, “Increase our faith” (17:5).
2. They strongly felt the need for an increase of faith. Albert Barnes said, “They felt that they were prone themselves to harbour resentments, and that it required an additional increase of true religion to enable them to comply with the requirements of Jesus...The duty of forgiving offences is one of the most difficult duties of the Christian religion. It is so contrary to our natural feelings; it implies such elevation above the petty feelings of malice and revenge, and is so contrary to the received maxims of the world, which teach us to cherish rather than to forgive the memory of offences; that it is no wonder our Saviour dwells much on this duty, and so strenuously insists on it in order to our having evidence that our hearts have been changed.”
3. It seems as if the apostles were saying, “Lord, we need that forgiving spirit, but we are too weak. Lord, we are selfish and self-centered and self-absorbed, so Lord, increase our faith.”
4. When the disciples prayed, “Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5), our Lord responded by saying, “If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine (some commentators say this was a mulberry tree) tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you” (17:6).

5. There is a similar statement in Matthew 17:20. After our Lord's disciples could not cast the devil out of a young boy, the disciples asked Jesus "Why could not we cast him out?" (Matthew 17:19).
6. Our Lord said to them, "Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20).
7. The battle in Matthew 17 was with a demon. But in Luke 17 the battle is with self.
8. In both cases, our Lord gave the same reply: "If ye had faith as a grain of a mustard seed..."
9. These words reveal that it is not the quantity of faith, but the quality of faith – we must have real genuine faith, and if we have that kind of faith, then "nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20).
10. Faith is trusting God. Faith is the open heart towards God, and it is through the channel of faith that Christ lives in and through us.
11. A grain of mustard seed is very small, but it contains life within. There is tremendous potential in that little mustard seed!
12. In his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, G. Campbell Morgan tells a very interesting story about the death and burial of an unsaved man in Italy.
13. Before this worldly man died, he ordered a huge block of granite, with instructions that this block of granite be placed over his tomb. He said that if there ever was a resurrection, he would not rise up from the grave because of this heavy block of granite.
14. He died, and his plans were carried out, but right before they placed the huge block of granite on top of his tomb, a little bird flew over the grave and dropped an acorn there.
15. The granite block, weighing several tons, was placed on top of the grave...and on top of the little acorn.
16. Today that huge piece of granite block is split in two – right down the middle. And growing out of the split is a huge oak tree. The living power in that little acorn has split the granite block.
17. If you and I have the "faith as a grain of mustard seed," we might say to a sycamine tree, "Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea," and it should obey us (Luke 17:6).
18. G. Campbell Morgan said, "If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, if your faith has but a living quality, if your faith is more than a dead orthodoxy, the acceptance of certain statements as true intellectually, if it is a living thing, which in your life is producing results that are in

consonance with the things you profess to believe, than there is nothing impossible, said Jesus" (*Luke*).

IV. UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS (17:7-10)

1. If we exercise great faith (cf. 17:5, 6), then God will bless that faith and wonderful things will happen – prayers will be answered, souls will be saved, and exciting things will happen as we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word.
2. Our Lord followed up His message about faith with a parable about service. Back in our Lord's day, a servant's work never seemed to be done.
3. Our Lord described a servant coming in from a long day of plowing or feeding cattle (the two main duties on a farm), tired and ready to sit down, only to be told to prepare the master's dinner (17:7, 8).
4. The servant will not have a chance to sit down and relax and eat his dinner until his master is served first.
5. Furthermore, the servant will not be thanked as if he had done something special. He was just doing his job. It was his duty (17:9, 10).
6. "We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (17:10).
7. Ecclesiastes 12:13 says, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."
8. It is a privilege to serve God. It is our duty to serve God.
9. Alexander Maclaren said, "No man among us, by any amount or completeness of obedience to the will of God establishes claims on God for a reward. You have done your duty — so much the better for you, but is that any reason why you should be decorated and honoured for doing it? You have done no more than your duty" (*Luke*).
10. Maclaren says the word "unprofitable" is not used in the bad sense the way the word is sometimes used, "but in the accurate sense of not having

brought any profit or advantage, more than was His before, to the Master whom we have thus served. It is a blessed thing for a man to call himself an unprofitable servant; it is an awful thing for the Master to call him one. If we say 'we are unprofitable servants,' we shall be likely to escape the solemn words from the Lord's lips: 'Take ye away the unprofitable servant, and cast him into outer darkness.' There are two that may use the word, Christ the Judge, and man the judged, and if the man will use it, Christ will not. 'If we judge ourselves we shall not be judged.'"

11. This humble attitude is in sharp contrast with that of the Pharisee in 18:11 and 12, who stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."

CONCLUSION:

1. The key word in Luke 17:10 is "duty." God has a work for all to do. It is our duty to do it.
2. One of my favorite verses is Colossians 4:17, "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it."
3. In other words, Archippus – do your duty.
4. D.L. Moody used to tell a story about a Christian man who was not a very effective soulwinner, but he did his best.
5. One night this man spoke to a cabby and told him, "I will sit here and watch your horse, and in addition I will pay you if you go in and hear D.L. Moody preach."
6. The cabby agreed, went in to the meeting, heard the Gospel, and got saved.
7. "We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (17:10).