Sunday worship message 2-12-16

**We are unworthy servants**

Luke 17:1-10

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.’”**

One man said it is so hard to live as a man because he should be a good father and good husband at home and good employee to his boss at his work. He complained saying, “Even just to be a good one of them is so hard, and how I can be good three of them?” So he was asked if he wants to live as a woman. His answer was “No, I don’t want because I have to do make up”.

Jesus’ word in today’s passage was given specifically to his disciples. The disciples were the ones who would take care of God’s flock and build up Jesus’ church with other disciples and serve God’s work as his servants. So the disciples had to be good spiritual leaders for young believers and good brothers to other brothers and sisters and good servants to God. In today’s passage Jesus told them what they should do to do good job for these three roles. It is very important for us to listen to Jesus’ instruction carefully because now we are the disciples who should do the roles during our life.

There are three parts in my message; Part I Watch yourselves, Part II You must forgive them, and Part III. We are unworthy servants.

**Part I. Watch yourselves (1-3a)**

This part is about how to serve little ones whom we should take care of.

Look at verse 1-3a. **1 Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. 2 It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. 3 So watch yourselves.** Through this word Jesus gave his disciples a great warning about causing little ones to stumble. In a race, a stumbling block can cause a runner to fall and get hurt seriously. Then the runner could fail to complete his race. In spiritual terms, causing someone to stumble means damaging or hurting someone spiritually through our bad influence. Jesus said, ‘**Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come’**. Jesus acknowledged that causing others to stumble is an unavoidable thing. Then who wants to make someone stumble? No one. But because of our sinful nature and weakness we can cause someone to stumble at any time. So being aware of this we should be careful all the time.

Jesus said, “**But woe to anyone through whom they come**.” Even though causing others to stumble is inevitable, Jesus still gave warning about God’s judgment upon it. We can make many excuses why we caused someone to stumble, but none of the excuses can set us free from our responsibility for causing others stumble.

Look at verse 2 again. **2 It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble**. This words show us how much serious sin causing little ones to stumble is and how severe God’s judgment on it would be. This is a picture of a millstone. What would happen if you jumped into the sea with a millstone tied around your neck? Look at another picture. Do you think this guy can survive? There is one shark there. Jesus told his disciple to jump into water with millstone because they’d better to die instead of being thrown into the eternal fire in the hell. One time Jesus said, **“And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut if off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell” (Mt 5:30)** If our hands cause ourselves to stumble we can cut off your hand, but if we cause little ones to stumble we have to jump into the sea with millstone to die. So causing little ones to stumble is more serious sin than causing ourselves to stumble even though both cases would end up going to hell.

Who are the little ones then? Little ones refer to the people who are spiritually young and whose faith is not strong yet. They could be our young children, young believers, and any people who are under our spiritual care or influence. When people are young they depend on their seniors for their growth trusting them and following their teachings. This is the way how they grow. So if we are in leading position, our influence over the little ones is very significant and we can give them serious spiritual damage through our misbehavior or sin. But sometimes we don’t care that much about causing little ones to stumble. But God cares it very seriously.

The disciple might be excited about becoming spiritual leaders over many people. But now they had to realize how much serious job they were about to do. It was great blessing for them to take care of God’s flock but they were in great danger of God’s judgment because of the possibility for causing the little ones to stumble. It is great blessing for us to have many children under our care and to have chance to serve young ones through spiritual leadership. But we should remember that they are God’s sheep and God is seeing how we are influencing them.

Then what should we do to prevent causing others to stumble? Do we need to order a millstone through Amazon.com and go to Long Beach pier, tie it around our neck, and jump into the Pacific Ocean? If all of us do that together on the same day, it would be headlines on CNN news. Jesus said, “**So watch yourselves**”. It means we have to check ourselves about how we are influencing young ones and make all every effort not to commit this serious sin. Young children and young believers get negatively affected when they see their believing parents’ or their spiritual seniors’ behavior or life don’t match with what they teach or say. If we find anything that could be a stumbling block to little ones, we should remove it. Apostle Paul said, **“Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.”** (1 Co 8:13). I think Apostle Paul was not vegetarian. Probably he enjoyed eating meat. But for the sake of those whose faith was not strong enough he was willing to stop eating meat. We need to be able to stop doing even something that we enjoy if that could give negative influence to the little one.

Also Instead of causing little ones to stumble, we have to give good influence to them. In **Mt 5:16** Jesus said, **“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven”**. The best way to help little ones to grow is to show them good examples. If we just want them to grow well without good teaching and example, it is like a coach who wants his team members to play well without teaching them anything. To do all of these we really need God’s help. We need’s God’s Spirit, his wisdom, love and power. That’s why it is so important for us to come to God for help through prayer and word of God and be filled with Holy Spirit. When we are filled with his Spirit we can help our little ones to grow well and avoid causing stumbling block.

**Part II. You must forgive them (3b-6)**

This part is about how to deal with brothers and sisters who sin against us. This matter affects the relationship and unity among peer disciples.

Look at verse 3b,4. **“If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. 4 Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”** Jesus said, **“If your brother or sister sins against you**. Jesus knew that his disciples, brothers and sisters in the church, would sin against each other. It is not surprising to us, because we’ve experienced it often even among us. All of us are saved and saints and precious children of God. But our unsanctified sinful nature still remains in our body. Because of our sinful nature and weaknesses, we sin against each other sometimes.

Then what we should do when our brothers or sisters sin against? The Lord said**, “Rebuke them”.** When we see our brothers and sisters committing sin, we need to rebuke them. The purpose of rebuking is to help the sinning person to repent and be forgiven to restore the relationship with God and with others. We rebuke not with a judgmental spirit but out of genuine concern and love. But rebuking is a very hard thing to do. Someone says rebuking is harder than forgiving. Because it is difficult to practice, often we keep silent. But still Jesus said, **“Rebuke them”** because it is the way to help the sinning brother or sister to repent and be forgiven and changed. When I had a chance to talk with some of the JBF girls, I asked them who they think is a good teacher at school. They said a good teacher is ‘fun’ but at the same time, they should also be ‘strict’. They know that a good teacher is the one who is not just ‘fun’ but the one who can discipline them with rebuking. May God help us to show genuine love to each other through having courage to rebuke each other with God’s love. We also should be mature enough to accept brother’s rebuke as genuine concern and love.

And Jesus said, **“If they repent, forgive them”** Here we see that repentance should proceed forgiveness. Jesus repeated the same word twice, “If they repent, forgive them. If they say, ‘I repent’, you must forgive them.’ If we want to be forgiven by God or others, we have to repent first. But it doesn’t mean that we forgive someone only if the person says, “I repent”. Jesus prayed for sinners on the cross even though they didn’t repent yet saying “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”. But if we don’t repent we cannot experience the true blessing and power of forgiveness. Also when there is no repentance, there can be no restoration of a broken relationship. So we should repent saying genuinely “I am sorry. I sinned against you. Please forgive me”. These simple genuine words can melt all anger and bitterness and heal a person’s wounds and scars.

Now once a brother or sister repents, we must forgive them. Jesus said**, “You must forgive them”.** It means we have to forgive without making any excuses. This is a hard and difficult command to obey but this is the Lord’s command that we should obey by any means. Jesus even said **we must forgive one person seven times in a day**. It means that we have to forgive unlimitedly. For us, forgiving just one time is hard. One time I got so frustrated about me because I kept being angry at my daughter when she made same mistake for her math again and again even though I taught her same thing so many times. And I realized that it is not good to get angry at child. So I decided not to get angry whatever mistakes she would make. I even promised her not to get angry again because she said she gets sacred when I get angry. But my decision got broken just after she made two more same mistakes. And she said, “Dad. You broke your promise. I wouldn’t believe you”. Then how it would be difficult for me to forgive someone who commits the same sin seven times in a day?

Then why did Jesus tell us to forgive so often and even unlimitedly even though he knew it is hard for us to obey? It is because we ourselves need to be forgiven that often and God forgives us that often. We commit so many sins against God and others in a day. Sometimes we don’t even know that we are sinning. Dr. John Jun said he checked himself based on Ten Commandments every day before he goes bed. He said he finds several sins every day and repents. God forgives our sins even a hundred times in a day when we repent. Now God wants us to forgive others just as he forgives us. Our forgiveness is different from the forgiveness of people in the world. People in the world forgive others based on their good mind and generosity. That’s why their forgiveness has limitations. But the forgiveness we practice as children of God is based on God’s unlimited forgiveness.

How did the disciple respond to Jesus’ command? Look at verse 5. **The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”** Hearing what Jesus said, the apostles shouted to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” Why did they ask the Lord to increase their faith? Their request doesn’t seem to be relevant to forgiveness. But it is actually closely related. Here, we can find deep truth about the relationship between forgiveness and faith. When the disciples heard Jesus’ command, they thought it was an impossible thing for them to do. Realizing they couldn’t obey with their strength, they wanted to have more faith so that through God’s strength, they could forgive. Here we find the truth that we can’t practice the forgiveness that God wants us to, through our own strength or good mind. We can forgive as much as God wants us to, only when we have faith in God. When we have faith in God, God gives us power, strength, courage, love, humility, hope, and grace to forgive. Forgiveness is really a matter of faith not matter of our good mind. So when we have difficulty forgiving someone, we need to make the same request as the disciples did, “Lord, increase my faith”.

How did Jesus reply to their request? Look at verse 6**. “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you**. In response to the disciples’ request, Jesus didn’t say, ‘Wow how did you guys know that you need faith to forgive. Wow you guys grow a lot. I am proud of you.” Rather he said, **“If you have faith as small as a mustard seed…”** What is Jesus talking about here? Here, Jesus is talking about the quality of one’s faith. The disciples thought what they needed was more faith. But Jesus wanted them to have a real and true faith. Jesus compared real faith to a mustard seed. A mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds on earth but once it is planted, it grows to be a big tree. The size of the seed doesn’t matter. What matters is whether the seed is a real seed or not. So we have to check if our faith is real and true faith.

Jesus mentioned the power of real faith**. “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.”** Real faith can even uproot a mulberry tree and plant it in the sea. This means that if we have genuine faith we can do something that looks really impossible for us to do. Forgiving someone seven times a day sounds impossible for us to do. Sometimes our wounds, scars, anger, bitterness caused by someone’s sin take deep root inside of us. They seem never to go away because their roots are so deep. But when we have genuine faith in God, all these things can be uprooted and thrown away in the deep ocean. And we can forgive freely.

The disciples had to take care of little ones well. But at same time they had to maintain good unity with other brothers. Jesus want them to build up one body of church but knew that sin against each other would break the unity. And he told them forgive and love one another to restore the unity. May God help us to restore any broken unity be forgiving each other by faith in God.

**Part III. We are unworthy servants. (7-10)**

In this part Jesus taught his disciples what kind attitude they should have to discharge their duty as God’s servants. Look at verse 7-10. 7 **“Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? 8 Won’t he rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? 9 Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? 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.’”** In the parable, a servant work hard in the field plowing and looking after sheep. When the servant came back from the field being tired, his master didn’t tell to eat and take rest. Rather he demanded the servant to work more to prepare his dinner. Even he told the servant to wait on him while he was eating. And he didn’t say any word of thanks to the servant even after the servant had done all the work. How would you feel if you were the servant? I think our women coworkers might understand this servant better. They work all day long and still they have to prepare dinner after their work. We can imagine that the servant might feel so stressed out and complain and get angry about how the master had treated him. He might feel like to quit his job as servant taking off jacket and throwing it away.

But Jesus said, **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.’”** This word implies that the servant didn’t complain at all about his hard work and how the master treated him. How could he do that? The servant said, “I am unworthy servant; I have only done my duty”. The servant didn’t complain because he thought, “I have just done what I am supposed to do” as a servant. If you still cannot understand how the servant could do that you don’t understand the meaning of living as a servant for a master. In ancient time servants, in other word slaves didn’t have any right at all. They lived only for their master’s need only. They lived for their master not for themselves. This is the meaning of living as a servant. They worked hard to meet all the master’s order. But they were not proud of what they did or didn’t complain about their master’s demand. Also they didn’t expect any thanks from their master because they thought that was their duty. Paying tax is duty for all U.S citizens who have certain income. No one praises us when we pay tax because that is our duty.

Through the parable Jesus taught two things to his disciples. First, the disciples would do a lot of work as his servants. In the parable the servant worked hard in the field all day long and he had to do another work after coming back. They couldn’t take rest until they completed all of their master’s order. Jesus taught his disciples that they would do a lot of work to take care of God’s flock and his church. They had to do the work until they died. There was no retirement for them. As God’s servant there is no retirement for us. We will do God’s work until we will die and our work will keep increasing.

Second, Jesus taught his disciple to serve their duty recognizing them as unworthy servants. Serving God as unworthy servant means to serve God’s work without any pride or self-righteousness keeping humility. Working for God, the disciple could develop certain pride and self-righteousness. They could think that they did God’s work sacrificing their whole life and suffering a lot. When they have a lot of fruits through their work they would be proud of it. But when they don’t have fruit they would complain and feel sad wondering why God doesn’t reward for his work.

But Jesus told them to consider them as unworthy servants saying, “We are unworthy servants, we have only done our duty”. Again the duty of servant is to do what the master wants him to do. It doesn’t matter how much work they should do, how much the work difficult is, what kind result they get through their work. They should do it because that is their duty. As master’s servants they should do it. If they don’t do it, they are not his servants. So after we do all the work God told us to do we should say, “I have only done my duty”.

And we should consider ourselves at unworthy God because becoming his servant and serving his work are all God’s grace and God is the only one who deserves to be praised and honored. We think we do God’s work through our labor and skill. While it’s true that we worked to accomplish something, the fact is that all things were done by God’s grace. Even the Apostle Paul said, “**10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.**(1Co 15:10). After his hard working, he realized that all his work was done by the grace of God. So the more we work for God, the more God’s grace will be revealed and we will confess that we are unworthy servant.

Most of all, living as servant of God and doing his work itself is great blessing for us. What kind life we had lived before we met Jesus? We served ourselves our master. As the result we became slaves of sin and servant of Satan. What would happen if we live as servants of sin? We cannot expect anything good from it but only terrible doom. But God saved us from the horrible life and blessed us to live serving him as our master. How big blessing it is to live as servant of God instead of servant of ourselves or sin. So serving God as our master and doing work for him is the best way to live a life. So the more we work for him the more we are enjoying his blessing. Then could we have self –righteousness because we are enjoying this blessing? Should we be sad because there is no visible fruit? No. Actually we should thank him all the more when we work harder and harder even without visible fruit saying, “I am unworthy servant. I have only done my duty”.

In conclusion, God blessed us to live as Jesus’ disciple serving his flock, building up church with other brothers and sisters and serving his work. These blessings have challenges. But if we follow Jesus’ instruction in today’s passage we can enjoy these blessing abundantly. May God help us to show good examples to our little ones and build up unity through unlimited forgiveness by faith. Also may God help us to his work with humility and great thanks so that we may be praised God as good and faithful servants.

One word, “We are unworthy servants”