

The Unprofitable Servants | Luke 17 : 7 – 10

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[0 : 00] Welcome to Ontario Community Church, where we are encouraging, equipping, and engaging lives for Christ.! I'm Pastor Patrick Daly, and each week I share sermons that balance the grace and love of Jesus Christ with the truth of the Word of God.

Together, we'll explore Scripture using observation, interpretation, and application. This helps us discover practical ways to live out our faith every single day.

Let's dive in together into God's Word. Well, good morning, everyone. I hope all of us are staying cool as the weather is starting to heat up and everything.

I want us to turn our Bibles to the Gospel of Luke as we just had our Scripture reading in Luke chapter 17. What we have here is we'll be going over the unprofitable servants from verses 7 through 10 in the Gospel of Luke chapter 17.

In order for us to even begin to understand this very heavy, it's simple but yet it's heavy, parable.

[1 : 14] I want us to turn there and start in verse 17 here where we see in the first two verses where Christ is saying to his disciples, right?

Talking about the temptations that they are sure to come, right? Woe to the one through who they come. It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and cast into the sea.

That's very, very harsh language we're seeing. But it's a warning from Christ against causing these little ones to stumble. And this is found after the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

And it's very important for us to consider the context of what is going on here. That the rich man's sin was making an idol out of money.

And that's something that was very common back then and it is still common even now. That there are people who they will idolize riches, fame, things that are outside of the Lord.

[2 : 17] We have to consider this. It goes on then into verses 3 and 4, right? Pay attention to yourself. If your brother sins, rebuke him. And if he repents, forgive him.

And if he sins against you seven times in a day and turns to you seven times saying, I repent, you must forgive him, right? It's showing the importance of, well, rebuking and repentance, right?

Who here likes being rebuked here, right? Nobody. Nobody in that. But it's showing that when there is wrong that is being done, there's the call for repentance.

There's the call for speaking to that. Forgive as you have been forgiven, in other words. Which then is leading us into 5 and 6 as it's kind of paving the way here where the apostles are saying to the Lord, increase our faith.

And the Lord said, if you add faith like the grain of a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it would obey you.

[3 : 19] And that leads us now to this parable of the unworthy servants. Where we start off where it's saying, will any of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in the field, come at once and recline at the table.

It's talking about the return of servants. It's now very commonly in scripture and the biblical culture back then. The plowing of the field and the tending to the sheep was the most common duty that was expected from a servant.

And so it's very interesting. We see plowing and shepherding, right? The breaking the hard ground, the soil as it were. And of course, shepherding would be caring for and guiding the flock.

So we see that there right away. It's important for us to see these are a couple of things that were common for servants to have. Leading into verse 8 then, will he not rather say to him, prepare supper for me and dress properly and serve me while I eat and drink and afterward you will eat and drink?

We'll just finish this off. Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say we are unworthy servants. We have only done what was our duty.

[4 : 45] It's kind of a strange parable if you think about it. Well, when we're going back to verse 8, verse 7 and verse 8, the servant, he is plowing, he is keeping the sheep.

This idea of reclining at a table, you see this a few times in scripture. When you first read it, you think, okay, the guy's just, he's had a hard day at work.

He wants to sit down. He wants to have some water. He wants to have a break. That's not what's being explained here. The reclining at the table is speaking of a place of honor.

Now, when you read it on the surface, you get one understanding, but culturally, reclining at the table is more of the place of honor where you are being served rather than just simply sitting in a chair or sitting on the couch after a hard day's work.

So that's very important for us to see. Then, of course, yeah, it says honor, leisure. It's found in the gospel of Luke chapter 12.

[5 : 57] We're not going to turn there. 12, 37 and John 13, 23. So it's saying that there is still work that needs to be done in the respect that you as a servant are not being placed in a position of honor.

That's what's being said here. Now, before the servant eats, he must serve the master, right?

That's what we're seeing in verse 8. Will he not rather say to him, prepare supper for me and dress properly and serve me while I eat and drink and what does it say after?

Afterward, you will eat and drink. So it's showing here. So the master's not being neglectful. It's just understand that there's still things that have to be done in this respect.

And so in verse 9 then, does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? That's an interesting question. Well, in this case, and it's hard for us to read something like this because we think of servants and slaves and that kind of language back then, it's hard for us to understand in a modern sort of concept that happens.

[7 : 17] Well, we don't necessarily have slaves or servants nowadays, or at least I hope you don't. But it's important for us to at least understand that back then that was more common in the given culture.

And so what he's saying here is that the master's not going to give extra favor for doing what's already meant to be done.

It's kind of like a similar rendering, a similar theme that we can see would be if you have a job and you have your employer and you're expected to do certain things, well, it's nice to get a pat on the back, but when you're doing what's already expected of you, you should see it through to the end, right?

You should complete your job at hand. That's kind of the only modern parallel that we could see nowadays because, again, we don't have servants and slaves anymore, so it's a little hard for us to understand.

And then, of course, at verse 10, it closes off, so you also, when you have done all your commanded, say we are unworthy servants, we have done what was our duty.

[8 : 28] That's kind of a strange one there. Being unworthy. And so, when it's talking about we are unworthy, it's talking about the word unprofitable.

For those of you who remember the series I did on Philemon, you had Onesimus, who was someone, his name means useless or useful.

He was once useless, and he became useful. It's very similar language in that, that we are unprofitable, right? So it's similar to what we would find in Philemon.

And so, it's the wordplay. This parable, then, even though it may be hard for us to understand, is very similar when we start connecting the dots with other parables.

For example, the parable of the prodigal son. You remember that story. The one runs off, squanders all his money, and he comes back, and there's a celebration.

[9 : 37] And you had the other brother, who was rather upset. And I'll tell you, I feel like I'm not the only one who struggled with that parable, right?

We can be honest here. Well, there's this big celebration of this son that's returning, but some of us identify with the other son that's been there the entire time, doing what he's supposed to do.

Very similar language to what we're finding here. These servants are doing what they're supposed to do. They are already within the fold, within the protection, within the knowing of the master. And so, there's no need for celebration. As hard as it is for us to understand, and even at times, well, agree with it, that's what the Lord is going for in that.

The other thing is, well, when you think of the parable of the talents, it's, in other words, how someone responds to what the master, to what God has for your life.

[10:45] Are you going to do what the Lord has called you to do, or are you not? That's what we have here. And so, this then kind of leads us into our interpretation here.

It's only a couple of verses here that we're seeing. Our interpretation then, or you know what? Let me go here. This is our outline.

The servant returns from the field. The master's orders to prepare my supper. There's no extra thanks for the mere duty. And the disciples are saying, we are unprofitable servants, which is showing this mirroring for what, one, a disciple of Christ is supposed to do.

Now, when you think about it, I want to stop for a second. I want you to see the parallel here. When we're talking about, because this is very negative language, it's kind of like, this is kind of sad.

It's kind of like, okay, saying that you're an unworthy servant and I've only done what I'm supposed to do. We have to look at it as these servants are known by the master and the servants are doing what they are called to do.

[11:57] And when the disciples, then, are saying the same thing, it's much like how we, when we are in, when we are saved by grace through faith, there are things that we ought to do.

Following in the footsteps of Christ. And so, the first point here, when we go into our interpretation, this will make more sense, that obedience creates no leverage.

It's not like these servants who are already under the protection, they're, you know, employed, they're housed, all these things, it's not like they can do something extra that would make the master owe them money.

Does that make sense? And so, in the same way, for us being saved by grace through faith, we are called to do good in the name of Christ, we are called to grow in Christ, but it's not like we're going to have leverage against God.

It's not like we're going to outperform God. The Lord has us covered through the blood of the Lamb. The Lord has us covered.

[13:12] And us, like trees, we are to produce fruit, we are to bear good fruit, that's part of being in the vineyard, being in the care of the Lord.

So, that first point there when it says obedience creates no leverage, even in the context within this parable, even having the mustard seed like faith or constantly forgiving each other doesn't create leverage against God.

okay, when you're in the fold, you are in, amen? So, it's not like, hey God, I went above and beyond because that's going to create a works-based system.

And that's not what God is going for. Remember the point when we think of all of Christianity that we are saved by grace through faith that whosoever believes shall not perish but have eternal life. and yet often at times we still like to go back to the old system where look at all that I'm doing.

[14:27] I want extra things. And what it's saying here is well, you're still a servant here. And so, in other words, the things that you do does not create a debt that God can pay because God's already paid the debt.

So, you don't have to, you're still called to do things but just understand you're not going to give God a bill when he's already paid it all. The second thing then is that grace empowers our service. This is a very powerful thing that the servant again already belongs to the master. So often in scripture, you see the apostle Paul saying that he is a slave or a bond servant or he serves the living God.

The idea being that he belongs to Christ and that he serves the living God. Belonging to the Lord, belonging to the master, we are protected, we are saved, we are secure, and we are called to be healed, to be transformed, to grow, and to be moved to produce fruit.

It's much like how we find in Ephesians, you are saved by grace through faith, not by works so that no man may boast. It goes on into that verse 10, we are saved for works.

[16:02] We are saved so that we can do good for God's glory. And so whether you are in the field or whether you are helping the flock, you can see the spirituality in that.

When we think of the soil, breaking ground, when we think of hardened hearts and how God is working through you to change hardened hearts to be soft, or even shepherding, which is ministering to people, showing care and compassion to your neighbor, your brothers and sisters in Christ, those around you, those that you interact with.

We are empowered because we can have confidence in the living God, because we can have full confidence in our salvation. That should be the greatest motivator for us to act, to share in the gospel message with others, to share in your testimony.

How has God worked in your life? Have you experienced his healing or a still small voice? Or maybe just a simple transformation, maybe a simple change in how you love or how you live or how you speak to others.

Perhaps it is important for you to take inventory of these kind of things. The third thing then is humility guards against what church?

[17 : 49] Entitlement. Now, it's very important we see so much in scripture where we have to be mindful. We have to check our pride.

There's a famous saying that I like when I first heard it, I've never forgotten it. It's you got to check yourself before you wreck yourself. Right? You got to check your pride. In other words, you have to check your heart.

And so when you see here the unprofitable servants, it's about the heart. Recognizing that they are serving the master and they need him.

again, that's hard for us nowadays to understand. But back then, that made a lot of sense. In other words, think of it as without the Lord, we are nothing.

We rely on the Lord as the source of life. We rely on the Lord for salvation in Christ.

[18 : 54] Christ. We rely on the Lord, or at least we should to guide us and to help mold us into who he wants us to be. How much trust do you put in the Lord?

I can't answer that for you. But it's a question to think about. If we are to boast, let us boast in the Lord and not boasting in ourselves.

so when you see that last thing, when you see that last verse, we are unworthy servants. They are recognizing.

They are humbling themselves before God. That is what you're seeing in this scene. We have only done what is our duty.

We have done what you have called us to do. It's a posture of humility. They are considering their heart before the Lord.

[19 : 54] Which leads us then, what do we do with this? It begins to make a lot more sense.

Because at first you read it and you're like, okay, these servants are just, they're being very humble.

But we start to see, a servant looking towards his master is realizing he is, in this case, is thanking the master for being, remember how I talked about previously, you want to be in the vineyard?

You want to be in the protection of the Lord? Well, you want to be where God is. You want to serve the living God. You want your life to reflect and to shine the light of Christ so that others can see.

And so, what do we do with this? The first thing is to develop a servant's heart in prayer. There's many of us that know someone who has a hardened heart.

Don't raise your hand, but do we know someone? You may know someone who is resistant to God, is resistant to Scripture, is really resistant to, well, any good thing that comes from the Lord.

[21 : 25] Hopefully, it's none of us here. But even if it is, it is important for us as the body of Christ, Christ, as the church, to pray that hardened hearts will be softened.

Not only should we pray for one another, but we should pray for our friends, our families. Think of someone that you know who has a hardened heart, and pray for them.

And if you realize that you have a hardened heart, praise God. Let this be a time for you to pray to the Lord and come before Him and ask for that heart transformation.

Because God is the God of transformation. So consider some prayers when you wake up in the morning. Father, show me what you have for me today.

Or in the evening before you go to bed, the good that I have accomplished, I thank you for. It is yours.

[22 : 34] I give to you what was due, what was expected. And I tell you, this is a challenge. This is not an easy thing to preach upon, let alone to implement.

But how beautiful is it to wake up in the morning and ask God to lead and guide you? What do you want me to do today? How can I glorify you in the morning?

How can I thank you today? Or at the end of the day, and look, when we think of us today, we may not always have a perfect day.

Let us turn to the Lord in those good, those bad days, and of course, those ugly days. None of us here have had an ugly day before. We've all had ugly days, right?

We've had bad days. You still give it to the Lord. God, I didn't have a good day at all. My AC went out. My tire went flat.

[23 : 38] My boss was mean to me. Whatever it is, offer it to the Lord. The second thing, then, is to serve without what?

The expectation of applause. And Scripture talks about this so much, right? To not be like the hypocrites, for example. There's a famous quote or saying, and if I get it wrong, I apologize. It's basically, character is what you do when no one is watching. Something to that effect, right? Or integrity.

What do you do when no one is looking? Do you steal the five dollars? when no one's there? It's five bucks?

Or do you do the responsible thing? That's a question. In the same way, then, even when what you're doing, when you're serving the Lord, or you're giving it all at school, or you're performing your best at work, whatever it may be, always remember you do your best in excellence for the glory of God, and recognize there will be times well, how many times have we done something and not gotten a pat on the back or an applause or an appreciation?

[25 : 01] Please don't raise your hand. But there are times where that happens, especially like when I think of my own children, when we think of our own kids, the things that we do behind the scenes to make life better for our family, for our friends.

things. And so it's a call for you to consider, just like that first point, how is your heart, you know, the first point is for you to ask yourself, what is your heart posture towards God?

Do you have a soft heart or a hardened heart? For the second one is, will I still do the right thing even when no one is looking? That's a way to gauge your heart.

Am I still going to serve the Lord even when I'm not appreciated? Am I still going to do the right thing even when no one is looking? That's a hard question for sure.

Because a lot of us, let's be honest, we like getting appreciated. We like being thanked for what we do. And certainly we should thank others. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying don't be appreciative or thankful for what others do.

[26 : 13] But when you are serving, understand that may not always happen. And so, when we think of our time, our talent, and our treasure, give to the Lord.

You are serving him and not man. And in everything, just know that it does matter what you do.

The final thing then is to lead as a servant leader. There's no spacing there. That's all right. It's to lead as a servant leader. What does it mean to be a servant leader?

Well, first off, it is knowing that you belong to the Lord, right? That you're growing in him and you're moved to live like him, to love like him, and to lead others by Christ's example.

example. Doesn't Jesus Christ give us an example of how we should live our lives? Doesn't scripture tell us that we should forgive one another?

[27 : 25] Showing compassion, love, but also we have the love side and we have the truth side because we stand on the truth of God's word and we deal in love.

And so it is through your words, it is through your actions, how you speak to people. How do you speak to your neighbor?

How do you speak to your family? How do you do that? And also in your actions. How are your actions? I mean, I know a lot of us, we know that actions speak louder than words, but the two should be in alignment.

Don't be a hypocrite in your words and your actions. they need to be in alignment. Be an ambassador for Christ.

That's what matters, is that you represent Christ. In knowing the Lord, in believing in him, recognize that you're saved, and be transformed by him.

[28 : 36] Show others through your words and your actions that you are a Christian, that you are saved. And whether you are out in a field, preparing the soil or preparing hearts, or whether you are

tending the sheep, whether it's literal sheep, or it's tending those that know the Lord, the flock, what matters is that you belong to God, and you serve him.

we are certainly saved by grace through faith. We grow and we do good in his name. That is our calling. That is our mission.

That is our objective, to be saved, to grow in his name, and to do good in the name of Jesus Christ. Certainly the setting and the situation may change, but God is constant. Who do you belong to? And who do you serve? Let us remember then, that God's grace is enough. God supplies us with all that we need.

[29 : 57] What a wonderful God that we serve. Without him, we are nothing. And to bring it all home, I want to challenge you. I want you to turn your Bibles real quick as we close here.

I want you to go to 1 Peter. It's not on the screen. 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 11.

It's on page 1206 in the ESV Pew Bible. I'll start with verse 8.

Are we all there, church? So I'll start with verse 8. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

[31 : 16] When we talk about being a servant, part of that is stewardship. As good stewards of God's varied grace, whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God, whoever serves as one who serves by the what?

The strength that God supplies, in order that in everything may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen. Do you see that there? it helps us with our understanding of the parable that whoever serves, God will give you the strength and he will supply with what you need and in doing this that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

And so let that truth, let that remain with you today as we close and we see how powerful this parable is.

May it stir our hearts. May we have a heart of gratitude. May we seek God, grow in him, and do good in his name.

[32 : 41] Let's pray together. And Father, we thank you for this time, this opportunity for us to go over your word.

What a very unique and very deep and very heavy parable that you have here. And although we may not fully understand it here in 2025, as we know, hundreds, thousands of years have passed by, may we recognize that these servants were dedicated to you in service.

And although we may not have slaves or servants today, may we at least recognize that the servants in this parable relied on you, recognizing who they belong to.

May we consider that. May we think about it, that we belong to you, that we serve you. Father, I pray that if there's anyone who has a hardened heart, that it may be softened I pray that if there's anyone who has not had a relationship with you, may they repent the changing of mind to believe in you.

I pray that we may together and individually grow in you, continuing to be molded and transformed by you.

[34 : 11] And I pray that we don't have an inactive faith, but we have an active faith, living out the gospel, being that ambassador for Christ in what we say and in what we do.

May you stir our hearts much like you stirred the heart of pagan kings to act. May you stir our hearts to be empowered, to be more like you.

It is in Jesus' name that we pray, and we all say together, amen. Thank you for listening for this week's message from Ontario Community Church.

I pray that you are encouraged and strengthened in your walk with Christ. For more sermons and resources, visit Ontario Community Church dot org. May God bless you as you live out his grace and truth every single day.

God Thank you.