

Sermon Luke 17 1 10 20th S af Pent (06 October 2013)

Sermon: 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Luke 17: 1-10 (v.5): “The apostles said to the Lord: ‘Increase our faith!’”

Theme: “Lord, increase our faith!”

Goal: Our life as God’s servants reflects our faith.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: If you have an employee, as a businessman or as a housewife, what do you expect from him or from her? To do just what you request from them, only their duties? ... or to show goodwill and to try to do some other small things besides their regular duties?

Today Jesus is talking about our Christian life as God’s servants. He is the employer, we are his servants. It is a blessing not to be unemployed, but to have the privilege to serve Him in His Kingdom. This is God’s grace, that He calls us to His Kingdom and accepts us as His servants. But the standard that God requires from His servants is a very high one! “... just as He (God) who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I (your God) am holy’ (1 Peter 2:16). We are not able to be holy by ourselves. We need God’s grace and forgiveness through Jesus. The two situations that Jesus mentions in our text show how weak we are to do God’s will. It seems that Jesus brings us down when He says: “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’.” No one can boast on what he or she does in God’s Kingdom. We depend on God’s mercy always! Therefore the disciples requested: “Lord, increase our faith.”

## **I – Things that cause people to sin**

We are not perfect as Christians. *“Christians are in danger of offending by treating others self-righteously and judging them harshly”* (SC p.248). This happens in our home as well: How are we handling our spouse and our children in our home?

Jesus is talking about “one of these little ones”. These can be the little children at our home or at the church, or a little one in faith, someone who is weak in his faith, a new Christian, a visitor. In either case, we cannot offend them and cause them to fall from faith. There are some cases when children don’t want to come to the service any more because they don’t see a good Christian example of their father or mother at home. What they see is drunkenness, adultery, harshness, lack of love... “So watch yourself” says Jesus, to not “cause one of these little one to sin.”

We must confess our unworthiness, ask for forgiveness and pray: “Lord, increase our faith” and help us to live a godly life according to your will, at home and always.

## **II – To forgive our brother**

The second situation Jesus mentions has to do with forgiveness. “If your brother sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent’, forgive him.” It seems to be something impossible to our nature. To forgive once or twice, O.K... But seven times a day? Do you have patience to do it?

How many times does God forgive you every day? ...and during your life time? And we know and believe that whenever we come to God and ask for forgiveness with faith in Jesus, He is willing to forgive us. Why should it be different among us? I know that it’s hard, but this is God’s will to His children.

Again, we must confess our unworthiness, ask for forgiveness and pray: “Lord, increase our faith” and help us to live a godly life according to your will in the relationship to my family, to my friends, to all.

### **III – Faith and Deeds**

*“The Lord reminds us that the amount of faith is not as important as the exercise of the faith we already have. Even a small faith (like a mustard seed) enables Christians to do their duty toward fellow Christians. Faith is instrumental, for through faith the power of Christ becomes effective in the believer’s life. Good works flow from faith. But these good works should not make Christians proud and lead them to expect recognition from others or from God. Faith is a gift of God and so are the good deeds that spring from it. Besides, our good works are still imperfect, and in doing them we are only doing our duty as God’s servants”* (SC p.248).  
Therefore we have to confess: “We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.”

An African Theologian wrote: *“Our faith does not make us powerful authorities but humble servants of God... We must never get into our heads that we have served God so well that now we have the right to put our needs before God’s requirements... Jesus’ comments raise the issue of faith and good works. We need to remember that it is in our existence before God that we obtain grace and are justified. In our existence before our fellow humans, we are engaged in great and genuine struggles for freedom and seek to serve others. Faith does not replace works, but the latter follows the former. According to Luther, when ‘Christ has been grasped by faith’ and when such faith becomes operative, then we do ‘good works, love God, give thanks, and practice love towards the neighbor’* (ABC p. 1237).

Conclusion: We know that so many people try to bargain with God: *‘I will do this and you will give me this’* ... or: *‘if you give me what I want, I will give a good amount to the church...’* as if they deserve God’s blessing. Let’s think a little bit about it and let’s go back to the situation I told you at the beginning, if you have an employee at home or in your office or factory: If you, as boss, decide to give a gift to your employee, besides his regular salary, this is grace, this is free... he cannot claim it, even if he did something extra. And if the employee does something more besides his duties, it shall not be done intentionally waiting for an award, but good willing.

This is our situation as God’s servants. The apostle Paul questions: “What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Corinthians 4:7). Everything we have is by God’s grace. And it is given to us to be shared with others and to help others in love.

“Lord, increase our faith.” - How weak we are as we search our hearts and compare our behavior to God’s Commandments! We shall not compare ourselves with other people, if they are worse than we or if they are better, but we shall look into God’s mirror, the Ten Commandments. And the only thing we can do is to confess our unworthiness, as Jesus says in our text: “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’.” We rely on God’s mercy only. Therefore let’s pray with the disciples: “Lord, increase our faith.” He is willing to forgive us as we approach Him in faith and He dismiss us in His peace. Amen.

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Cape Town, 06 October 2013 (Adapted)