

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
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Living As Servants

1 Peter 2:18-21

2:18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.

2:19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

2:20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

2:21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

1. Teaching for Servants

Today's reading is the teaching for "servants." In the first century of Roma, it says that 60 million people were in bondage. Most of them were bought by rich masters and assigned to various works. In Colloquial Translation, it implies 'slave' in Japanese, and on the other hand, New Inter-confessional Translation used the word for 'servant.' Anyway, many people were possessed as properties in this generation. Now, "slave" is estate of the realm, but "servant" is the kind of occupation. Slaves were sometimes intelligent workers, such as doctors and teachers; so they were regarded well as important roles of the society. Servants, however, were only recognized as 'manpower' because they were just 'server.' Needless to say, 'slaves' didn't have human rights; so they were no longer in secure status, but 'servants'

were in harder situation.

In present generation, slavery no longer exists. Except a few countries, no one were bought as property and forced to work. Yet, people are still ranked as managers or the others in any societies and organizations. You must know that employees cannot be against of the employer, and subordinates have to be obedient to their superior's forces. Even though various laws are executed for protecting the rights and status of the labors, some people are still imposed on unreasonable works or harassments from superiors and colleagues. People are working in the same circumstance and relationships for 2,000 years, so today's lessons are still relevant for us.

The Bible teaches the servants to "be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. (18)" This is the lesson for being honest and loyal without hidden thoughts or affairs. That means no one can be injustice to his or her work, even if your employer did wrong. Long time ago, servants were stated insecurely, but most of the masters didn't touch their servants' jobs; then a few of the servants became injustice. Jesus talked about those servants in His parables. For examples, the servant abused other servants and had the irrelevant party (Luke 12:45), the servant wasted the master's properties (Luke 16:1), and the servant didn't utilize the stock in capital for business (Luke 19:20-21). Dishonest and disobedient servants were not a few, I suppose.

However, people believe in God and follow Christ won't be the disobedient servants in any generations or societies. Well, we mustn't be. When someone does wrong, we can't pay back the same way. Nowadays, in Japan, one automobile maker faked the data of

fuel consumption; the other politician privately wasted the public budget, and another professor in the university manipulated the data for thesis. Injustice will be cleared, though such great ‘manipulation’ exists. We might live in the society “No reward for the right people,” but as long as you live faithfully and work with loyalty, you will be greatly rewarded. Faithfulness and loyalty is not only God’s calling, but also the protection of man. Even if no one praises you in this world, you’ll be applauded in heaven. Mother Teresa said, “God does not require that we be successful only that we be faithful.” The most beautiful compliment from God at the time He welcome the believer is that, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” (Matthew 25:21)

2. Mindful of God

However, it is not easy to endure the unfairness. Also, it is very difficult to deal with the injustice and unfairness in today’s work environment. But many of them could be solved by your endurance. You might regret if you quit the job by the temporary feeling. For any human relationships, it might not be rare to think and regret “Oh, I should have chosen the words”.

I said “endurance” but the endurance that the scripture teaches us is not just endurance. If you keep the endurance in your heart, it will be transformed into grudge, which stays and preoccupy your heart. You will become bad if you work in the terribly stressful environment. The true “endurance” is that you surrender the problem to God and wait for the solution of God. Secondly, the scripture mentioned in the verse 19 and 20 “For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For

what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.”

“Be mindful” This direct translation is “Through the conscience of God”. But it does not make sense so that the most English translations use the words, “for conscience toward God.” (KJV) So it means “the believers’ conscience is lighten by God so that you can think with the conscience. You shall follow the conscience and endure the hardship”. In Japanese, conscience means “good heart” but the conscience itself is only the mind. It is not good thing or bad thing originally. If it goes to good thing, it leads us to good. If it goes to bad thing, it brings us in the situation that you can not make decision of good or bad. Therefore, your “good heart” always follow God and know the heart of God.

In the New Japanese Bible, the translation is “because of the conscience before God”. On the other hand, the New Inter-confessional Translation is “by knowing that the hope of God” and ESV is “mindful of God”. The Colloquial Translation is “Look up to God” so it is similar. We tend to forget about God when we encounter the suffering and sadness because the emotions preoccupy our mind. In this situations, we are sometimes lost to the emotions and forget to think what God is looking for us. It is not true endurance. In any situations, we shall be aware of God who is looking at us. We shall invite God into our mind. This leads us to true endurance. When we encounter injustice suffering, we can surrender it to God. God gives us the power to move forward.

3. Following Christ's Example

The Bible teaches us in verse 21 “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” In other words, it says “Servants, Christ is your example. Follow in his steps.”

For Christ to be an example of “servant” or “worker”, He had to be a servant himself. Actually, Christ, who is God and the Lord became a servant or a worker. Philippians 2:6 says, “Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Jesus Christ not only obeyed God as his servant but also became a servant for humans and wrapped a towel around his waist and washed his disciples' feet. Lord Jesus is to be served by people, but instead He served people and gave everything he had to them. Lord Jesus said, “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” He gave and gave, and finally He gave himself, his life, to people.

Humans can become children of God by believing in Jesus Christ. They receive the eternal life and they are promised to go to Heaven. They can reign in Heaven with Christ. There is no higher position than this. But believing in Jesus Christ is, at the same time, to become a servant and serve God and humans.

The confession of faith in early church was “Jesus is Lord.” (1 Corinthians 12:3) People were saved by declaring, “Jesus is Lord”

with their mouth. But no one can call Jesus as their Lord without becoming his servant. Therefore, those who are saved by declaring that Jesus is the Lord are called to live as servants of Christ.

Furthermore, growing as a Christian means being transformed to the shape of Christ. But since Christ took the shape of servant, Christians should live as servants. Then, Christians can be grown by becoming servants of Christ.

Bible argues that when every Christian is a servant of Christ and called to live as a servant, those who are actually live as a servant should do so. But to live as a servant is against the sinful nature of human. Sin exists when humans want to be the first before God and want to control others as they wish. To live as a servant is against human nature. However, it becomes possible through Jesus Christ who lived and died as a servant. Before the words, "Christ Jesus, Who, being in very nature God, ..." there is a verse that says, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:5) God will blow the heart of servant that belongs to Christ into the heart of believers through the Holy Spirit. By that, we will faithfully work and mindful of God, we endure and follow the example of Christ.

To live as a servant looks cheap and unexciting, but in fact it is not. That is the excellent way of living, looking upon God and humans. Those who had lived their life aiming for the spiritually elevated life found Jesus Christ in their life. When we become a servant and serve God and humans wherever we are, then we can testify Lord Jesus. We would like to continue to make testimonies and receive the words from the Lord saying, "Well done, good and faithful

servant.”

(Prayer)

Dear Heavenly Father, please help us live as servants and praise Lord Jesus and testify him. We pray through the name of Lord Jesus, who became a servant in order that we can live as his servants, Amen.