

Preparation for the Service

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In this article, I would like to discuss the preparation required to serve the Lord.

“The one with two talents also came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two talents. See, I’ve earned two more talents.’ His master told him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy servant! Since you have been trustworthy with a small amount, I will put you in charge of a large amount. Come and share your master’s joy!’” (Matthew 25:22-23, International Standard Version).

“Tychicus, our dear brother and a faithful minister in service to the Lord” (Ephesians 6:21).

It is an unignorable fact that some believers of Jesus Christ, while claiming that they are serving God, actually work for their own purposes and serve God in a worldly manner.

“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name, drove out demons in your name, and performed many miracles in your name, didn’t we?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who practice evil!’” (Matthew 7:22-23)

What matters to Jesus is not what and how much we do, but it is with what kind of “motive” and “strength” we serve Him.

We all know about the number “zero.” On thermometers, “zero” stands between positive and negative temperature. However, in the Bible, “zero” points to the cross. The cross determines whether our service is temporal or eternal. If a servant of God has experienced the cross personally, his or her service shall bear fruit. Therefore, what is critical to servants of the Lord is how much they have experienced the cross and how serious their determination for the cross is.

What does the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross mean to us? It signifies that Christ sacrificed Himself in order to take the punishment we deserved, by which we are already forgiven.

The epistle to the Romans, chapter 6 tells us how the

power of sin has been broken down and how our old nature was crucified with Jesus. When we see this fact, it makes us determined to surrender all things to the Lord and serve Him throughout our lives. However, as we are so determined and begin to serve the Lord, we all experience what is written in chapter 7; we realize that it is impossible to serve Him in our own strength. What we are taught through this chapter 7 is that we cannot serve the Lord in our own strength and our service is meaningless unless the Lord God Himself works through us in it. However, even though we have such experience, it still does not mean that we are completely ready to serve the Lord. Here, let us discuss three things that are necessary for us to become truly qualified to serve the Lord; (1) the battle within our souls, (2) ideal education and (3) the secret for the service.

1. The Battle within our Souls

To begin with, we must sense the battle within our souls. Even the Lord Jesus felt a conflict in His soul. Jesus was always determined to perform nothing but the Word of His Father, and He actually did so. Jesus had His own intention, but He always had this attitude of His mind; “Not what I want, but Father, please let me do what you want,” as He completed His life in this world.

When Satan tested Jesus in the wilderness, he did not tempt Jesus to do major and evident sins such as murder or adultery. He only attempted to let Jesus act on His own accord ignoring the will of His Father. However, Jesus Himself reacted, “The Son can do nothing on his own accord” (John 5:19). This determination was the secret of His service which eventually bore abundant fruits.

Complete obedience is the very secret of bearing fruit. However, it is not enough for us just to remember it for the sake of having knowledge. We need the Lord to lay His hands on each one of our weaknesses and tell us, “This comes from yourself, not from me and it has to be dealt with.” It is necessary for us to realize what we truly look like in the eyes of the Lord and distinguish what is carnal and what is spiritual within us. In order to differentiate between them, there is no other way than for us to be exposed to the light from above. Let us pick up the experience of some prophets who encountered this light from the Scripture.

When Isaiah saw this light, he cried, “I am ruined! And my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of the Heavenly Armies” (Isaiah 6:5).

Ezekiel described, “The appearance of the radiant light resembled that of a rainbow shining in a cloud on a

rainy day. This was what the appearance of the form of the glory of the Lord resembled. When I saw all of this, I fell flat on my face” (Ezekiel 1:28).

Daniel confessed; “I was left alone to observe this magnificent vision. Nevertheless, no strength remained in me—my face lost its color, and I became weak” (Daniel 10:8).

In the case of Peter, it is recorded that when he insisted that he did not know the Lord, “The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word from the Lord, and how he had told him, ‘Before a rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.’ So he went outside and cried bitterly” (Luke 22:61-62).

When Paul was illuminated by the light of the resurrected Lord, he “dropped to the ground” (Acts 9:4). John met the Lord on the island called Patmos and he “fell down at his feet like a dead man” (Revelation 1:17).

When the Lord opens the eyes of our hearts, we realize our hideous appearance, which makes us fall down to the ground. However, unless the Lord opens the eyes of our hearts, we have no chance to realize how miserable, pitiful, and repulsive we are.

The Word of the Lord is light, which exposes all things and burns down all that oppose God. After we encounter the light of His Word, which shows us the true state of ourselves, we no longer will be able to rely on our strength. Jesus said, “I can do nothing on my own accord” (John 5:30). We all should share this determination of our Lord and completely rely on Him alone. It is only when we do so that the Lord Jesus will call us His true disciples. Until then, however, “the battle of our souls” will continue. Let us look at Peter as an example.

One day, Jesus asked Peter, “Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15), and he answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Then, Jesus told him, “How blessed you are, Simon son of Jonah, since flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, though my Father in heaven has” (Matthew 16:17). However, after a short while, he had to offer these harsh words to rebuke the same man, Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to me, because you are not thinking God’s thoughts but human thoughts” (Matthew 16:23).

How did Satan get into the heart of Peter? And how does Satan exert the same power on us? Whether the power of Satan affects us or not depends on whether we control ourselves or we surrender our control to the

Holy Spirit. If we place ourselves under the “control of our souls,” it means that all things are done for the sake of our own interests, our own benefit, and our own satisfaction and our services are based on worldly values. When we serve this way, we are acting like Peter when he tried to stop Jesus from walking toward the cross and was rebuked by Him. If we accept the “control of the Holy Spirit” alone, our services will be all focused on the will of the Lord—on what pleases Him. What God is pleased about, what God always has in His mind is the cross. It is only through the cross that God accomplishes His purpose. Satan always tempts us to keep us away from the cross and compromise with this world. Peter persisted in his interests and desires, which made him connected to Satan. This time, Peter relied on himself too, instead of completely relying on the Lord.

Furthermore, when Jesus said, “All of you will turn against me this very night. Before a rooster crows this very night, you will deny me three times” (Matthew 26:31, 34) before the night He was going to be arrested, Peter answered to the Lord Jesus, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you” (Matthew 26:35) filled with a burning passion for Him. Relying on oneself this way always leads to a connection with Satan.

Although we too serve the Lord with a determination to work for Him without fearing even death, later, when we are enlightened by the light of the Lord, we realize that our services have been done by our own strength. For the true service to be performed, we need to go through this “battle within our souls” so that we no more rely on our own strength.

2. Ideal School

In order for us to experience the battle within our souls and to become the true servant who relies on the Lord alone, we need to learn. Now, what kind of school is “ideal” for us to learn how to become the true servants? It must be a school that educates people to serve not on their behalf, not based on their own interest or intention, but to accomplish something completely entrusting everything to the Lord.

Although Paul had a remarkable innate ability as well as very high education and knowledge, he was not prepared to become the “true servant.” After he encountered the resurrected Lord, he was transformed and was equipped with all he needed; then, he mentioned:

“For while I was with you I resolved to know nothing except Jesus the Messiah, and him crucified. It was in weakness, fear, and great trembling that I came

to you” (1 Corinthians 2:2-3).

I mentioned earlier that our old self has been crucified with Jesus Christ. However, what is discussed in here is not our old self, but our “innate man” or our “innate abilities.”

“Now, we do not belong to those who turn back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved” (Hebrews 10:39).

“Because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:9).

“By your endurance you will protect your lives” (Luke 21:19).

These verses are telling us that our “souls” do not need to die like our “old selves,” but it “needs to be saved”; that is to say, our souls must always be under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Now, let us pick up four passages from the Bible and learn from them. These passages help us understand how and in what ways our “souls works.” Then, we will learn from these passages that in order for us to be delivered from our self-centred way of life, there is no other way we can take than to walk carrying the cross of our own every day.

(1) Gospel According to Matthew, Chapter 10, verses 34-39:

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword! I came to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A person’s enemies will include members of his own family.”

“The one who loves his father or mother more than me isn’t worthy of me, and the one who loves a son or daughter more than me isn’t worthy of me. The one who doesn’t take up his cross and follow me isn’t worthy of me.”

“The one who finds his life will lose it, and the one who loses his life because of me will find it.”

The Lord Jesus is telling us here that those who follow Him will walk the way of the cross. “The one who loses his life” refers to the person whose personal desires and intentions are eliminated by the cross. If we belong to the “ones who truly lost their lives,” the Holy Spirit will guide us and take us to the way of the cross.

For the churches that are the body of the Lord, all

unification as the product of “compromise” is totally of no avail. What matters is whether we “are worthy of” the Lord Jesus Christ.”

When Jesus clearly showed Peter the way that led to the cross, he was still controlled by his own intentions. Let us move to the next passages from the Bible.

(2) Gospel According to Mark, Chapter 8, Verses 32-35:

He (Jesus) was speaking about this matter quite openly. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, Jesus rebuked Peter, saying, “Get behind me, Satan, because you’re not thinking God’s thoughts but human thoughts!”

Then Jesus called the crowd to himself along with his disciples and told them, “If anyone wants to follow me, he must deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow me continually, because whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and for the gospel will save it.”

When the Lord Jesus began to walk toward the cross, Peter rebuked Him. Peter did not want Jesus to give up His life. We are acting very much like Peter at this time, aren’t we? Instead of surrendering our lives and our intentions to the Lord, we insist on realizing our own wills. Peter rebuked Jesus, saying, “You care about your life.”

However, Jesus only wanted to follow the will of His Father. He was not interested at all in His own emotions, thoughts or satisfaction. It was because of this that the Lord Jesus told them, “If anyone wants to follow me, he must deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow me continually, because whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and for the gospel will save it” (Mark 8:34-35).

What about us? How much do we love and respect the will of the Lord indeed? We may strive to do the will of the Lord, but very often it is not accompanied with enough “love” for the Lord. We want to become someone who desires nothing other than what pleases the Lord Jesus.

Peter was so much worried about Jesus when he rebuked Him. However, in the eyes of the Lord, it was done for an impure reason. When Peter did so, he cared equally about both God and himself. Therefore, Jesus, being aware that Peter said these words from his love for Him, had to rebuke him with these harsh words, “Get behind me, Satan.” We want to be someone who sincerely thinks of God alone.

Now, let us look at Lot's wife.

(3) Gospel According to Luke, Chapter 17, verses 29-35:

But on the day when Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed all of them. The day when the Son of Man is revealed will be like that. "The person who is on the housetop that day must not come down to get his belongings out of his house. The person in the field, too, must not turn back to what's left behind.

Remember Lot's wife! Whoever tries to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it. I tell you, two will be seated on the same couch that night. The one will be taken, and the other will be left behind. Two women will be grinding grain together. The one will be taken, and the other will be left behind."

In these verses, the Lord Jesus is implying the time He will come back to this world. Lot and his family were delivered before the two sinful cities, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. It is mentioned that, at the time of His Second Coming, in a like manner, "the one will be taken, and the other will be left behind." And, we need to pay special attention to these words of Jesus; "Remember Lot's wife." Why did the Lord say so? He continued: "Whoever tries to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it." Although Lot's wife was delivered from destruction, because she was distracted by worldly concerns and looked back to the town, she became a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26). Do we always think of His Second Coming and are we waiting eagerly the day Jesus will raise us up to live with Him? Are the joy of the Lord, the will of the Lord and the desire of the Lord placed at the first position of our daily lives? We are blessed if they are.

We also need to seriously contemplate the meaning hidden in His Words, "The one will be taken, and the other will be left behind." How can we prepare ourselves so we are not left in this world when the Lord comes back? The Lord Jesus explains:

"So keep on watching, because you don't know on what day your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42.)

Those who knowingly refuse to obey the Lord, those who choose to marry non-believers knowing that it is against the will of the Lord, those believers who are occupied with worldly matters and engage in the service of God for their own benefits and by their own strength cannot be regarded as being prepared for the

Second Coming of the Lord. If "the Lord is everything" in your life, you can be considered to be ready for His Second Coming.

Aren't the gifts we received from the Lord placed at a higher position than the Lord Himself in our daily lives? Or, don't we consider that our service for the Lord is more important than the Lord Himself? These are not trivial questions.

Has the cross freed us from all human relationships and worldly concerns so that we are connected only to the Lord and things that come from the Lord? If it is not so, the Second Coming of the Lord will not be pleasant for us, but it will be something formidable.

Paul, who loved the churches of the Lord and fought long for them said, "I am jealous of you with God's own jealousy, because I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to the Messiah" (1 Corinthians 11:2). If the groom finds out that his appointed bride is in love with another man, he will feel quite sad. We want to be people who bear the cross and who will share the joy with the Lord when He returns.

(4) Gospel According to John, Chapter 12, verses 24-25:

"Truly, I tell all of you emphatically, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it produces a lot of grain. The one who loves his life will destroy it, and the one who hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life."

Let us look at the expression, "The one who loves his life will destroy it." The term "life" here refers to our "souls." Our souls represent our own interests, our own intentions, and our own desires. "A grain of wheat" represents the physical body of Jesus Christ. Although each grain of wheat contains life in it, unless it falls into the ground and dies, that life would neither come out of the grain nor bear fruit. Likewise, although the Lord Jesus had eternal life, it would have been enclosed inside Him just like a grain of wheat if He did not die. It was not only to cancel our sins that Jesus died on the cross, but it was also to bear many fruits; it was to impart His own life and spread it to the world.

Paul too, in order to bear fruits, strove to die the same death as Jesus and handed his soul over to death so that the life of Jesus is revealed in him. Paul explained his deed as:

"While we are alive, we are constantly being handed over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the

life of Jesus may be clearly shown in our mortal bodies. And so death is at work in us, but life is at work in you" (2 Corinthians 4:11-12).

This is exactly the secret of the true service that bears abundant fruits. Of course, all those who were newly reborn conceive eternal life inside themselves. However, why do so many Christians today fail to reveal their indwelling lives to others? They look so devastated; they seem to have no victory and no joy at all. It is because, by the functions of their souls such as pursuing their own interests, intentions or desires, their indwelling life of Jesus is enclosed deep inside and kept inactive, just like the grain of wheat is enclosed in its shell.

Let us look back on the disciples of the Lord Jesus. When James and John observed the people of the Samaritan village refuse to obey Him, they asked the Lord to call fire down from heaven to destroy them (Luke 9:54). Peter relied on himself and declared that even if he had to die, he would never deny Jesus (Matthew 26:35). Other disciples disputed with each other and argued who was the greatest among them (Matthew 18:1).

However, when these disciples went through the cross, met the resurrected Jesus and received the Holy Spirit, they were transformed to completely different persons. They died to themselves, were filled with love, were now patient and humble, and they had nothing to be scared of. Blood, honour, their own glory, success or respect from others did not matter to them anymore. Through the Holy Spirit, they were liberated from their rock-hard egos and entered a life that was led by their Spirit.

3. Secret in the Service.

Finally, let us discuss the "secret in the service" for the Lord. Some people care only about themselves while others devote themselves to please the Lord Jesus. And some people read the Bible out of obligation without any joy at all. On the other hand, some people, read the Bible with a great expectation of getting joy, strength, and guidance from His Word. Why does such a big difference arise among the believers? And how were the disciples who used to care only about themselves changed so much in later times? The answer can be found in the gospel according to Mark, chapter 8, verse 34: "If anyone wants to follow me, he must deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow me continually." After the disciples met the resurrected Jesus, they picked up the cross and crucified themselves on it.

Those believers who do not bear their crosses, but are

occupied with their worldly affairs, honour or esteem do not satisfy the will of the Lord. Jesus will have to tell them, "You are not worthy of me," and "You do not qualify to become my disciples."

The self-centered way of life needs to be crucified every day and the life of Jesus has to be revealed through our daily lives. Let us pick up three examples in order to practically understand this:

(1) Aaron's Rod.

Let us begin with the Aaron's Rod.

The Lord instructed Moses, "Tell the Israelis to take a rod—one from each ancestral house, that is, one from every leader, for a total of twelve rods. Write each tribal name on his rod. You are also to write Aaron's name on the tribe of Levi, since there is to be one rod for every leader of their ancestral tribes. "Then lay them there in the Tent of Meeting in front of the Ark of the Covenant where I'll meet with you. The rod that belongs to the man whom I'll choose will burst into bloom. That's how I'll put a stop to the complaints of the Israelis, who are complaining against you."

So Moses spoke to the Israelis, and each of the tribe leaders gave him a rod, one for each leader, according to their ancestral tribes, for a total of twelve rods. Aaron's rod was one of them.

Then Moses laid out the rods in the Lord's presence, inside the Tent of Testimony. The next morning, Moses went to the Tent of Testimony and the rod of Aaron of the tribe of Levi had burst into bloom! It sprouted buds, bloomed blossoms, and produced fully ripe almonds! Then Moses took out all the rods from the Lord's presence to show all the Israelis. Everybody looked, and then each man took his rod.

Then the Lord instructed Moses, "Return Aaron's rod before the testimony to be kept for a reminder against the rebels so that you may put an end to their complaints against me and so that they won't die." So Moses did exactly what the Lord had commanded him to do. (Numbers 17:1-11)

People were becoming skeptical as to whether Aaron was truly appointed by God and if his work was certainly the service for the Lord. So, in order to show them who the true servant was and who was qualified to be appointed by the Lord, He commanded them to take twelve rods one from every leader. After the night was over, the rod of Aaron "had burst into bloom, sprouted buds, bloomed blossoms, and produced fully

ripe almonds." It was now clearly proved that Aaron was the servant who was appointed by God.

This Rod was left in the darkness all night and was not seen by anyone at all. But the next day, it burst into bloom and eventually produced fully ripe fruit. It is not until we go through the dark experience of death that we too can become true servants. By death, the "resurrection" and the "life" is brought into our lives and we will bear fruit only after we go through the darkness.

(2) Peter

Peter first relied on himself and even said, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you" (Matthew 26:35). He also drew his sword and cut off an ear of the soldier who came to arrest Jesus (John 18:10). However, the Lord could not use Peter as long as he was acting this way. Peter needed to be brought through the darkness. For three days after the Lord, whom he denied was crucified and died, Peter was left in the deep abyss of desperation and darkness. However, this experience gave strong influence to Peter's service to the Lord later in his life.

(3) Jacob

Finally, let us look at James as an example. James, a son of Isaac desired to serve the Lord and strove to do the will of God. But, he tried to do so on his own strength. All personal strengths need to be broken down.

He cried out to the Lord, "I won't let you go unless you bless me." (Genesis 32:26) They wrestled so hard, that his hip bone was dislocated in the struggle and he could not walk on his feet anymore. It meant that his strength was completely broken down. Since this time on, his name has changed from Jacob, which meant a "supplanter" to Israel which implied "God contends." We too need to move forward and reach this stage. It is not until we have nothing to depend on in us that we stop relying on our own strength and begin to rely on the Lord alone in testifying, leading others or in whatever we do. This way, we will come to understand that it is only in such service that the Lord works through us to bear an eternal fruit.

Have we already despised ourselves and realized how dreadful it is to rely on ourselves?

Our will against the will of the Lord. Our interest versus the purpose of the Lord — these conflicts will continue to exist in our souls throughout our lives. Because we have a nature to care only about ourselves, the Lord Jesus needs to take us to His training yard, so that we

realize how meaningless our own strength is.

If we become someone like Paul who "Worship in the Spirit of God, find his joy in the Messiah Jesus and have not placed any confidence in the flesh," (Philippians 3:3) and if we can say, "In the Messiah Jesus I have the right to boast about my work for God. For I am bold enough to tell you only about what the Messiah has accomplished through me in bringing Gentiles to obedience. By my words and actions, by the power of signs and wonders, and by the power of God's Spirit," (Romans 15:17-19). Moreover, if the Lord prepares us to participate in His spiritual service so that we can be the servant of Christ, we will be truly blessed.