

LUKE 17:7-10

ACT LIKE MEN! DUTY!

“Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? 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’? 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.’”¹

In this present series of messages, we are considering manly attributes that are valued within the brotherhood of believers. Let me present a disclaimer at the beginning of this message. As I acknowledged in a previous message, these attributes that we are considering are not the exclusive domain of males;² nevertheless, Christian men especially should ensure that these characteristics are not only esteemed, but they must be encouraged to inculcate them into their lives. In our study today, we are thinking of duty.

Undoubtedly, one can produce multiple examples encouraging duty in the Word of God. Undoubtedly, multiple passages can be suggested that plainly speak of duty. However, I want to think of duty in relationship to God. I want to encourage us to rethink our view of duty, ensuring that we bring our thinking into line with the will of the True and Living God as revealed in the Word. In order to accomplish this admittedly weighty task, I ask you to consider the teaching of the Master, delivered at a time when the disciples were asking Him to increase their faith.

THE SETTING FOR THE TEACHING — Jesus had spoken of the cost of discipleship—a teaching that is too frequently neglected in this day [LUKE 14:25-33]. His sobering statement demanding that potential disciples think carefully about the cost of following Him seems to have rocked the disciples. This statement was followed by a stunning statement obviously related to what had just been said. “Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear” [LUKE 14:34, 35].

The Master had then delivered a series of parables that spoke of the value of finding life and of the joy in heaven when people are born from above. He told of a lost sheep [LUKE 15:1-7], a lost coin [LUKE 15:8-10] and a lost son [LUKE 15:11-32]. The manner in which the sixteenth chapter opens leads me to understand that He immediately launched into a parable about a crooked manager [LUKE 16:1-9]. The application of the parable was again undoubtedly sobering. “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” [LUKE 16:10-13].

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Michael J. Stark, 1 Corinthians 16:13, 14, “Act Like Men,”

<http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/1%20corinthians%2016.13%20act%20like%20men.pdf>

The religious elite ridiculed what Jesus had said. Luke lets us know that they were motivated by a love of money. In their estimate, God was blessing them when they accumulated wealth. Knowing their hearts, the Master rebuked them [LUKE 16:14-17]. Undoubtedly, Jesus' words stung these proud arbiters of religious minutiae. However, He was setting the stage for what was to follow—condemnation far worse than anyone had ever spoken to them.

LUKE 16:18 seems almost undetached, as though Luke was simply collecting a number of sayings and throwing them wherever he could find a place for them. However, consider the context. Jesus had just been stressing the transition from what the religious leaders had known to that point—the Law—to the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom He was heralding [see MARK 1:15]. He presented an example to emphasise the manner in which the Kingdom of God takes up, confirms and extends the imperatives of the Law and the Prophets. The religious people had lived under the Law to that point, but it was passing away and the Kingdom of God was being brought into being. The Pharisees, who should have been leading people into the Kingdom of God, resisted entering in. His words served as a warning that they were being passed by rapidly, and one example of their failure was the business of marriage and divorce.

Briefly, weigh the example Jesus employed. From the beginning, God had intended that man and woman would covenant before the Lord to unite their lives. They were to make a commitment to one another before the Lord God; and they were to keep that commitment inviolate. To break that commitment and remarry is to commit adultery. That is how serious this business of commitment is in the eyes of God. The text punctuates the importance of integrity in one of life's basic aspects—marriage. Jesus is hurling a charge at the Pharisees, exposing the perfidy of their hearts.

The Pharisees ridiculed the Master on the issue of money, and Jesus was demonstrating that even in matters lying at the core of human relationship, these paragons of religion were duplicitous and deceitful. They could not be trusted to show integrity in business, nor in marriage, and both reflect our relationship to God Himself! The Pharisees scorned one caught in an adulterous affair; and yet, there are accounts of some who had had as many as six wives in serial marriage. They dismissed one for dubious reasons and picked up another, only to dismiss her to find another. The Master excoriated them for their lack of integrity and duplicity.

This scathing exposure was quickly followed by the account of the rich man and Lazarus [LUKE 16:19-31]. The story Jesus told, a recitation of an event only He could have known, was delivered as a warning to those listening not to ignore the Word of God. Note the concluding statement: "If [people] do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead" [LUKE 16:31]. Never forget, "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" [HEBREWS 4:12].

Then, turning to His disciples, the Master cautioned that those who would follow Him must guard their hearts and their lives. "[Jesus] said to his disciples, 'Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, "I repent," you must forgive him"' [LUKE 17:1-4]. Unlike so many of us who preach today, Jesus was unwilling to excuse sin. Make no mistake, it is sinful in the extreme to induce another to turn from grace. Even when we imagine that we are honouring God, if we cause a believer to stumble, we are culpable, and we must answer to God.

The stern position marked out by the Master elicited a collective gasp from the disciples: “Increase our faith” [LUKE 17:5]! Jesus met this exclamation with hyperbole, “If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you” [LUKE 17:6]. No one wants to uproot a mulberry tree only to cast it into the sea. The point was not that mulberry trees need to be uprooted, nor even that we should focus our attention on such trivial matters. The point was that faith leads to dynamic and dramatic events—the transformation of lives, the advance of the Kingdom of God against unimaginable odds, the removal of obstacles in life.

It is at this point that the Master spoke the words of our text. All these things had taken place in a very short time. What is important for us today is to note that Jesus’ words concerning our service to God is not a matter that should lead us to boast; rather, our service should lead us humbly to acknowledge the One whom we serve, commit ourselves to fulfilling His will and gratefully receive the mercies He extends to us.

CONSIDER OUR POSITION BEFORE THE LIVING GOD — “Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? 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’? 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.’”

In His response to the disciples, the Master made two key points and implied a third. We will benefit from consideration of what He said and what was left unspoken in this instance. What Jesus said was in response to the exchange we have just witnessed. The Pharisees may well have continued lurking on the edges of the crowd—they seem always to have maintained a “truth squad” nearby to attempt to correct the Master, or at least to report on what He said. However, He spoke in this instance for the benefit of the disciples. He delivered a stern statement that was intended to refocus their attention on what is truly important.

The first point to remember is that we are servants. We must remember that He is God, we are not. We are trained from children to situate ourselves at the centre of our universe. However, if we will be saved, God must be central—not tangential—to our lives. It is an axiom of the Faith that, “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” [LUKE 16:13].

Jesus uses the term “servants,” or as the footnote observes, “bondservants.” He is not speaking of individuals born into slavery or who was taken captive in war; rather, a bondservant voluntarily enters into service to the Master. Thus, the Master addresses His followers as bondservants—people who have bonded themselves to Him to perform whatever tasks He may assign. Understand, God does not compel service from anyone; however, whenever one enters into discipleship, that one recognises God’s legitimate claim over his or her life. His disciples have ceded to Him the right over their lives so that they may serve Him as He directs.

The point is more important than you might imagine. People attempt to seize control of their own lives; we do so almost unconsciously. No one enjoys being compelled to perform a task, and few truly enjoy the feeling that they have no control. Wives and husbands struggle to control one another. Employers and employees struggle to exert control over their work. Students even endeavour to wrestle control from the teachers. The battle to control our lives seems innate to the human condition. No less is this true in the life of the follower of the Master. Though we know He is Master, almost unconsciously we find ourselves in rebellion to His rule.

You may recall Paul's account of his struggle to surrender mastery of his life to the Lord. "I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

"So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death" [ROMANS 7:18-24]?

When the Apostle says, "I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members," the statement mirrors what he wrote to the churches of Galatia. "The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do" [GALATIANS 5:17]. In the flesh, we cannot please God.

Therefore, so long as we are in this life, we dare not exalt ourselves; we must come humbly into the presence of the True and Living God, seeking mercy and grace. That is precisely what we are taught in the Word. "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you" [JAMES 4:10]. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you" [1 PETER 5:6]. That is sound advice that Solomon gives:

"If you have been foolish, exalting yourself,
or if you have been devising evil,
put your hand on your mouth."

[PROVERBS 30:32]

Christ is Master; we who follow Him are His servants. Because we are yet in the flesh, we struggle against the temptation to promote ourselves before Him. We are confident that we have been redeemed to do His will; He does not exist merely to perform our bidding. Though He is gracious toward us, we are nevertheless, His servants; we are appointed to do what He commands. Then, when we have fulfilled every charge, we cannot boast. Rather, we are constrained to say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty."

I remind you of a truth neglected in this day. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" [JOHN 14:15]. He also said, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" [JOHN 14:21]. Permit me to remind you of one other similar statement the Master delivered to those who follow Him. "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" [JOHN 15:10]. Those who follow the Master accept their role as His servants.

John clearly understood the message Jesus delivered, for he spoke of this truth. "We know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" [1 JOHN 2:3, 4]. Consider yet another emphasis the Apostle of Love gave to those who would read his first letter. "Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us" [1 JOHN 3:24]. We reveal that we understand who He is when we obey Him, doing those things He commands of His servants.

THINK OF OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO GOD — “Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? 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’? 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.’”

It is a human tendency to ask “What’s in it for me?” whenever we are confronted with a demand. In this, the disciples were no different than we are. They were serving God, there is no question of that; but an unspoken question lingered immediately beneath the surface of their lives. That persistent question broke through on occasion as the disciples voiced their concern.

You will undoubtedly recall one occasion when Jesus spoke a hard truth concerning the difficulty experienced by those who have great wealth when they are called commit themselves to God’s mercy. Having heard the Master present this hard truth, the disciples were astonished. Spontaneously they exclaimed, “Who can be saved?” Jesus’ response was to provide one of the truly great statements designed to comfort God’s people throughout all time: “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God” [MARK 10:27].

This teaching, in turn, induced an involuntary exclamation from one disciple who was undoubtedly the most impetuous of all, Peter. “See, we have left everything and followed you” [MARK 10:28]. Matthew notes that Peter added, “What then will we have” [MATTHEW 19:28]? Translate Peter’s outburst into contemporary language, and you will hear, “What’s in it for us?” In fact, one contemporary translation presents Peter’s question in this fashion. “Look, we’ve given up everything to follow you. What will we get out of it?”³ The language employed in either Matthew’s or in Mark’s Gospel makes it plain that Peter was seeking reassurance that God noticed the disciples’ response and sacrifice. If I know much of human nature, it is apparent that Peter was especially focused on his own perceived sacrifice! “Jesus, what’s in this for me?” Peter sounds suspiciously like many of us modern Christians who, though we may never openly voice our concern that we are being adequately recompensed, wonder what God will do for us.

Jesus is not focused on grace at this point; He is schooling the disciples in responsibility. They have just heard that we who follow the Master are “servants.” I alluded earlier to the fact that we were not born slaves; rather, we voluntarily enter into service to the Master. Hence, we are bondservants—we have bonded ourselves to Him to perform whatever tasks He may assign. Understand that God does not compel service from anyone; however, we who are born from above and who have now come into His presence recognise His legitimate claim over our lives. Therefore, we call Him “Lord,” or “Master.” This is not merely an honorific that He bears; it is an acknowledgement of His position. We cede to Him the right over our lives so that we may serve Him. There must be no grudging service offered to our Master.

Perhaps we would do well to recall the fact that though we are saved by grace, we are saved to serve. God redeems us so that we may honour Him. Christ has welcomed us “for the glory of God” [ROMANS 15:7]. We are commanded that “whatever [we] do, [we are to] do all to the glory of God” [1 CORINTHIANS 10:31]. Remember that God “predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” [EPHESIANS 1:5, 6]. We have believed “to the praise of His glory” [EPHESIANS 1:12], and we were sealed with the Holy Spirit, “who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” [EPHESIANS 1:14].

³ **God’s Word Translation** (Baker, Grand Rapids, MI 1995); See also **International Standard Version** (ISV Foundation, Yorba Linda, CA 2011)

Nevertheless, we are redeemed and we are left in this world to serve the Lord of Glory. This is made abundantly clear in one well-known passage. “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” We are very quick to memorise these verses early in our Christian walk. However, I recommend that we must also memorise the verse that follows. That verse speaks of the reason we were saved. “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” [EPHESIANS 2:8-10].

Permit me to make a point that is too often neglected—a point that follows quite naturally in Paul’s presentation. Paul reminds us that we are saved individually, and we are responsible individually to endeavour to honour the Master. However, we honour the Master individually through corporate accountability. This follows from what he wrote after the verses just quoted. “Remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” [EPHESIANS 2:11-22].

Let this point sink deeply into your consciousness. We are individually responsible to know the will of God and to fulfil that will. However, the sphere in which we will perform the duties assigned is the congregation of the Lord, the assembly of the righteous. Faith in the Son of God results in life; and life, when it is received, leads the child of God into the Body of Christ, the local congregation, where she can grow and gain strength and build others. Tozer correctly noted, “Rightly understood, faith is not a substitute for moral conduct but a means toward it. The tree does not serve in lieu of fruit but as an agent by which fruit is secured. Fruit, not trees, is the end God has in mind in yonder orchard; so Christlike conduct is the end of Christian faith.”⁴

Related to this teaching is that verse found in Hebrews: “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” [HEBREWS 10:24, 25]. Each Christian is to serve; and the place assigned for each Christian to serve is the congregation wherein he or she has been placed! Through serving, we encourage others, lending strength to one another and bringing glory to the Name of Him who saved us.

Obedience is not a matter of merit. On the basis of the revealed Word of God, we cannot accept the teaching of supererogation—the Catholic doctrine that one can gain excess merit by doing works defined by the church as being above and beyond the call of duty. Even if we were perfect, we would only be doing what God has commanded us to do. There is no surplus of merit beyond that; God is not placed under indebtedness or obligation to thank us.

⁴ A. W. Tozer and Harry Verploegh, **The Size of the Soul** (WingSpread, Camp Hill, PA 1992) 71

Should a church member begin to live as though God were his debtor, it would demonstrate that the person was out of touch with reality. We see one such individual who thought himself entitled to special favour from God. Jesus told of a Pharisee and a tax collector, each of whom simultaneously went up to the Temple to pray. As He relates the account, Jesus said that the tax collector was unable to lift his eyes, he could only beat his breast and cry out, “God, be merciful to me a sinner” [LUKE 18:10, 13]! Contrasted to this contrite sinner seeking grace was the Pharisee, a pious individual who was apparently absorbed with himself. Jesus presents this man as standing apart from others, yet praying so that all could hear what he said. “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get” [LUKE 18:11, 12].

Jesus provided the application that the one who justified himself—the Pharisee, steeped in self-defined piety—remained without justification before God, whereas the sinner who humbled himself went away justified. Clearly, there is a danger that even religious people can miss the grace of God, failing to serve and failing to honour God, all the while imagining themselves to be powerful for the cause of Christ.

I knew such a man who thought very highly of himself. It seemed to many that he was genuinely convinced that God should be very proud that he was a church member. He used to come into each meeting saying, “I saved five people this week,” or “I saved two people today.”

I did not say anything for some time, until one day I casually asked, “Frank, let me see your hands.” He held them out, looking at me quizzically. I examined them carefully, at last stating, “Frank, you’ve saved no one today, or at any other time.”

To say he was incensed is making the case mildly. He vigorously protested until I said, “The One who saves any sinner has nail prints in His hand. You have no nail prints.”

I’ll grant him this, Frank was quick. “Well, they prayed the prayer,” he protested.

“What prayer is that?” I asked.

“The sinner’s prayer,” he said proudly.

“Praying does not save anyone. If they have been converted, where are they serving? What is the name of these people?” I probed.

“I don’t know,” he stammered. “They wouldn’t be comfortable here, in any case.”

As gently as I could, I cautioned Frank that he was degenerating into a religious fraud. He was cantankerous, obstreperous and even pugnacious. He was anything but godly. However, he had climbed the ladder of ecclesiastical position until he insinuated himself as a church leader. Now, though he was mean-spirited and combative, he was quick to let people know how godly he really was and how fortunate God was that he was in the church.

The great tragedy of this man’s life was that because he had promoted himself as a de facto elder, the congregation had taken on his character. Let me say this quite clearly, **EVERYTHING RISES AND FALLS ON LEADERSHIP.** If the leaders of the congregation are proud, the congregation will grow proud. If the leadership humbly seeks to serve, the congregation will serve. Again, Tozer has written, “I want the presence of God Himself, or I don’t want anything at all to do with religion. You would never get me interested in the old maids’ social club with a little bit of Christianity thrown in to give it respectability. I want all that God has, or I don’t want any.

Years ago, a godly saint observed, “I wonder also how many Christians in our day have truly and completely abandoned themselves to Jesus Christ as their Lord. We are very busy telling people to ‘*accept* Christ’—and that seems to be the only word we are using. We arrange a painless acceptance.

“We are telling people that the easiest thing in the world is to *accept* Jesus Christ, and I wonder what has happened to our Christian theology which no longer contains any hint of what it should mean to be completely and utterly abandoned to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.”⁵

That saint also wrote, “I want God Himself—or else I will go out and be something other than a Christian. I think the Lord had something like that in mind when He said, ‘I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.’”⁶

OUR STATUS IN CHRIST — We expect people to do their duty; yet, we give no medals for merely performing the duties we are assigned. We value those individuals whom we count trustworthy, who fulfil the tasks they are assigned. However, we are assured that when we serve faithfully, God will graciously take note of our service, showing us mercy and kindness.

This is the teaching of the Word. You will no doubt remember the words Jesus spoke, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life” [MARK 10:29,30].

The disciples had asked Jesus to increase their faith [LUKE 17:5]. However, the disciples did not need “increased faith”; they needed to ensure that theirs was transforming faith—faith that would make them true servants of the Master. Likewise, we do not need to pray for more faith; we need to ensure that our faith is such that it transforms us into joyful servants of the Master. At issue is in whom or in what do we have faith? If our faith is in our church, in our worship, even in our doctrine, we will be disappointed. Our faith must be in the Master, and He must be master of life. Either Jesus is Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all. He cannot be Lord out yonder, allowing us to conduct our lives as we wish and according to our own comfort level and be the True and Living God.

Perhaps we struggle now. Perhaps we face severe testing and strong opposition today. However, we are assured that if we persevere, Christ the Master shall reward us. We cannot claim that we are doing anything more than what we are responsible to do. Nevertheless, when we have served Him as we should, He will reward us for our service. There is a balance in serving Christ the Master. The servant knows his position and appreciates what his duty is. Nevertheless, God is very clear that when service is performed well and the servant is faithful, He will reward that servant. Let me give you a concise statement of this truth: **GOD REWARDS THOSE WHO SERVE WITHOUT THOUGHT OF REWARD!**

Let’s be very clear on this matter. We serve God because of who He is. He is worthy of our best service. We dare not get into a position where we imagine we can bargain with God. We cannot negotiate our service with God—He commands and we obey. In fact, our service is the natural outgrowth of appreciation because of the grace He showered on us when we were saved. To illustrate the appreciation we should have, consider a parable Jesus told on another occasion. “‘A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?’ Simon answered, ‘The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.’ And he said to him, ‘You have judged rightly’” [LUKE 7:41-43].

⁵ A. W. Tozer, **Who Put Jesus on the Cross** (WingSpread, Camp Hill, PA 1996) 56

⁶ A. W. Tozer, **The Counselor: Straight Talk About the Holy Spirit from a 20th Century Prophet** (WingSpread, Camp Hill, PA 1993) 38

Let me turn this imagery somewhat. In this parable, our sin is compared to a debt that is forgiven. It was not just a debt against my person; it was a debt so massive that it would be impossible to pay. Surely, this forgiveness of overwhelming indebtedness is a powerful motivator to love the One forgiving the debt. If God had only forgiven my sin, it would be a wonderful relief; however, He has done more than merely forgive my debt—He adopted me into His family, calling me His Son. Now, much as an orphan who once bore an unimaginable debt, I have not only been relieved of all obligations but I have also been accepted into the family of Him who has paid the liability levied against my very life. Thus, you can see why I contend that we have no right to negotiate with God about our service. Rather, we are to serve willingly and proudly to the praise of His glory from the privileged position He has created for us.

The great need of this church—indeed, of every church—are men and women determined to serve the Master because He is worthy of their best service. There is no easy place of service, not if that service is real. There are enough religious organisations willing to welcome any warm body wanting to be confirmed in the complacency that marks their lives. Let us determine that this will not be such a place. Let us encourage those who will serve to accept their duty to fulfil the will of the Master. Let us encourage one another to stand firm, to labour diligently, to advance His glorious Kingdom until He returns for His people.

Let me conclude by pointing you to a conclusion that was written long years before Jesus spoke the words of our text. The citation is that with which Solomon concluded the dark book of Ecclesiastes. He wrote, “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” [ECCLESIASTES 12:13]. This is excellent advice. Are you a Christian? What are you doing for the sake of His Kingdom? Do others know you are a servant of the King, Jesus the Son of God? Then, let us each do our duty to the praise of His glory. Amen.