

Just Do Your Duty **by Dr. Shelton Smith**

"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."—Luke 17:10.

I focus now on the last part of the verse: "We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." Some pointed things in chapters 14 to 16 pave the way for understanding this verse.

Parable of the Great Feast

In chapter 14, Jesus gave an illustration, a parable. He says a certain man made a great feast and invited many. I suspect, from what I read there, that he invited those who expected to receive invitations to such prominent events. I suspect that the first invitations that went out probably included the mayor, the councilmen of the city, politicians, doctors, lawyers and other dignitaries who held positions of prominence in their area.

But a number of them said, "We are going to be busy. We don't have time. And we're not really interested in what you're going to be doing at the feast." Or maybe they didn't like what was on the menu. They all had some kind of excuse as to why they couldn't come.

The story goes that the master of the house said to his servants, "You go out and find other people. The elite are invited, but if they won't come, then get the rest who live in that area—the maimed, the poor, the halt, the blind." These are the folks whom others pass by. Even some religious institutions would say, "We really don't have seats at our place for those people."

Make note of this fact: Sometimes we fuss at the churches that don't want the handicapped or don't want those who ride buses. And without question, we ought to fuss when a church thumbs its nose at the downtrodden and the hurting. But the fact is, some of our crowd turn up their noses at the attorneys and lawyers, the doctors and university professors, and others. If I understand this passage, we have every scriptural reason to go after every single person, including attorneys and doctors, the handicapped, those who are in wheelchairs and others who ride buses. We ought to sit side by side with all of them in the house of God. We are to keep on pressing and pushing and doing all we can until we fill up the house of God. Those kinds of people—every one of them—should be there! Even after he had sent out the first and the second invitations, the servants came back to report: "After doing everything you told us to do, there is still room in your house."

The man says, "Go out again. Go beyond the borders and perimeters of the city. Go out into the highways and hedges. Go where people have not been, into the obscure places where people have hidden themselves, and bring them in as well."

Stay at it until my house is filled."

It is for this reason that we should leave no stone unturned, no area of town unworked. We should make it our business to go seriously and genuinely to reach every soul in our Jerusalem.

Parable of the Savorless Salt

In this 14th chapter of Luke, Jesus reminds us that we are salt. He is talking about being salt in the highways and hedges (where people live and work). He is talking about being salt in the lanes and the streets of the villages and cities (in the human arena). You are salt.

If salt refuses to do its job, then those who live by the highways and hedges, by the streets and lanes of the villages and cities, will perish.

Salt acts as a preservative and a seasoning. If you don't put salt in at the right time, in the right place, and in the right amount, then there are unfortunate results. Things that would be useful become unuseful. They perish! They fall apart! They decay! Why? Because salt was not applied.

He said, 'If the salt has lost its saltiness, it is good for nothing.' We learned in the Sermon on the Mount that we are the salt of the earth. If we're not willing to be the salt that Jesus intended us to be, even if we're doing something good, something religious, we are good for nothing.

You say, "But we live in a world that has gone bonkers! Our society is so sinful and corrupt. It is hard to do what we should in the place where we live!"

I understand that, but Jesus said we are to be salt in just that kind of a world.

After having reminded us that our assignment is to go out and get people from all walks of life, from every corner of society, and seat them on the front seat, the second seat, the third seat—everywhere, until the house of God is filled—He says to each, "You be the salt. Go out and season! Get out and preserve!" In other words, do all that salt does.

Parable of the Lost Sheep

Now in chapter 15, Jesus gives three stories. First, He tells of a man who had a hundred sheep. On a given night, it seems one of them didn't come in. I can visualize that shepherd counting them: "Ninety-six, ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine..." He may even have said to his son, "Son, check back in there and count again. I must have miscounted."

Perhaps his son went back and counted again. He came back and said, "Daddy, you're right. There's only ninety-nine!"

Maybe the shepherd then said to his son, "Well, which one is missing?"

"Daddy, I think it's that little, scrawny runt. Remember, the one that's been sick ever since its been in the world?"

The shepherd replies, "Yeah, dirty little old rascal. Just a runt. It's

threatening weather, and there is no telling where he is. He's probably lying out there somewhere in a gully, in a ditch. I'm not going to fool with him. If he wanted to come in, he should have come with the flock! He knew this is the sheepfold, and he ought to get himself in here!"

You say, "What Bible are you reading out of?" Oh, I'm glad you're listening! What I've just described is not the heart of a shepherd! No, not at all! The shepherd looked at the situation. He counted and double counted. He knew that it was that one little, scrawny, sickly runt who was missing. But instead of the conversation I related to you a moment ago, I think he said, "Son, go get my heavy coat and that extra lantern. And you get your heavy coat and come with me."

The reason I suspect it was like that is that I grew up on a sheep farm. About the time I got into high school, Daddy thought his boys ought to have things to do.

I will never forget the day when that cattle truck rolled up at our place. They dropped the tailgate, and those woolly muttons started coming off the truck. There were nearly a hundred ewes (for you city folks, that's mama sheep). It wasn't long before we had four-footed woolly creatures all over the farm. Dad worked at a public job, and he would get home after dark in the wintertime. Almost every night when he walked in the door, he would say, "You got the work done?"

I would answer, "Well, yeah, Dad, we got the feeding done." But sometimes I would have to say, "Dad, we got one missing tonight."

He would ask, "Which one?"

I would answer, "It's old Dessie," or whichever one it happened to be. (After awhile you begin to give them names.)

"She hasn't had her lambs, has she?" he would ask.

"No."

"Let me get a bite of supper, then we'll go see about her."

We would both get a light. Even on nights when it was cold and maybe snowing, we would walk fifty, sixty or seventy feet apart through the fields shining the lights in one direction, then another. One of us would spot her down in a little ravine. More often than not, she didn't come in because she had had a couple of little lambs down there.

When you have a new mama, you approach her very carefully. We would take those little lambs in our arms. It wasn't an easy job when those newborns were covered with snow, rain, sleet and sometimes mud. Yes, I know what the shepherd does. You say, "But ninety-nine are in the house already safe." I know, but one is lost. And as long as there is one—even one in my family or your family, in your city or in my city—we are to remember the heartbeat of the Shepherd.

Parable of the Lost Coin

A second story in this 15th chapter is that of a lady who had ten coins and lost

one. Because these were her valuables, she swept the house, rolled up the rugs, moved the furniture—whatever was possible to do—looking for that lost coin. When she found it, she hooted and hollered and called her neighbors and said, "Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost." She was so excited when she found that one coin.

Sometimes we lose our heartbeat, our zeal, as the shepherd. We find the coin or little lamb missing. When the lamb comes back, we don't even get up to check on it. Every time we find even one that was lost, we ought to show excitement. I like what the preacher did here yesterday. When folks were lined up across the front, people came out of the pews to welcome those who had come forward. We must have sung forty-eight verses of one song! Amen! A precious and valuable coin is brought in; it has been found! We will celebrate and rejoice because a valuable one has been found!

Parable of the Lost Son

There's another story in this chapter, the best known of the three. A certain man had two boys. One day the younger boy said to his father, "Father, give me the portion...that falleth to me." (Little did he know!) His father gave him his inheritance. The boy went out into the far country. There he spent his inheritance, and when his money was gone, his friends were gone too. For a Jewish boy, nothing was more despicable than having to make his living in a hogpen. But there he was, grappling for a few husks to feed himself. One day when he came to himself in that hogpen, he said, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke 15:18,19).

I am grateful that the boy wanted to go home, but I am a little bit enamored with his dad.

Let me editorialize a bit. I think there were some times during the days his son was gone that this gray-haired dad sat on the front porch in the late of the day and watched strangers pass along the long lane. Probably there were days when he sat up on the edge of his seat, looking closely at them. Many times he was disappointed. He was looking for his son.

One day that boy comes down the road and turns down the lane. I can see that gray-headed dad sitting on the porch. He sees his boy turn in the lane; he looks closer, squints his eyes, gets up out of the chair and looks again. He may even hobble over on a cane to the edge of the porch to look.

He turns around to someone and says, "I'll declare, for the life of me, that looks like my boy! I've looked so many times and been disappointed, but it sure looks like him!"

In a minute he looks back down that lane, then says, "I recognize that form! That walk—it's familiar. That's got to be my boy. My boy is coming home!"

Remember now, this is the same son who took his inheritance and left. This is the same son who said, "Daddy, I don't want to hear it from you anymore. I don't want to follow your directions. I won't listen to you anymore."

That silver-haired dad loved his boy. When that son came home, he fell on his face before his father and said, "Make me as one of thy hired servants."

The father answered, "Hired help, nothing! Get up off your knees! Get up on your feet! Somebody get those old, ragged clothes off him and put a nice robe about him. Get a ring and put it on his finger so everybody will know he is a member of this family."

Not only that, but the father said, "Go out there and get one of those calves that we are fattening up for a celebration and kill it. Call the neighbors and friends and tell them my son who was lost is found!"

A few weeks ago down in the South, I preached on the Prodigal Son. When I finished, a lady came to me and said, "I have a boy like him. I've looked many an afternoon down that lane, but my boy still hasn't come home. Do you have any advice about what I might do?"

I thought for just a second, then I said, "The only thing I can suggest is that you be prepared with a robe, and get a calf ready. You've waited, longed and prayed; now just be ready because God will perhaps answer your prayer and bring him home one day."

We talk about soul winning, bus routes, building a Sunday school and having a great church; then when somebody comes along and sits where we've been sitting for the last four hundred years, we have to have an appointment with the pastor.

"Some of those people coming from the east side of town are sitting in my pew!"

We get upset about it, instead of saying, "Bless God! I had to stand up this morning because people filled the pew where I had been sitting!"

Thank God that they found the little lost lamb and brought him in! Thank God they swept the house and found the coin! Thank God this boy—lost though he was, out in the world though he was, doing everything that he should not have done—came home! You and I ought to capture the spirit of that father who said, "He's my boy! My boy was lost; now he's found!"

Then go to chapter 16 where Jesus reminds us that we ought to use every monetary resource we have, every physical resource we have, to make friends for Heaven for eternity's sake, for everlasting habitations.

Who Is Your Master?

He asks us, "Now, who is going to master your life?"

Everybody takes orders from somebody. You and I eventually have to decide who is going to be the master of our lives; who is really going to run our lives; who is going to tell us how we operate; who is going to be the authority in our lives.

Jesus wants to be that authority. He told us about a lost sheep, a lost boy, a

lost coin. He told us about the poor, the maimed, the halt, the blind. He told us about all these others who are going to be invited to the feast.

We say, "That sounds like work to me! It sounds like it is going to cost a lot. It sounds like our buildings are not going to be large enough. It sounds like we have to make great plans, have a great vision, and plan on doing things that others in town are not doing."

Jesus asks us, "Is Proverbs 11:30 still in your Bible? Is Daniel 12:3 still in your Bible? Is Psalm 126:6 still in your Bible? Is Matthew 4:19 still in your Bible? Is Acts 5:42 still in your Bible?"

We answer, "Yes, yes, yes."

Then Jesus asks, "Then who is the Master?"

You say to me, "Sir, are you telling us we ought to have a soul-winning church? Are you telling us we ought to have soul winning every week and that we personally ought to go soul winning?"

"Now everybody knows that the deacons ought to go soul winning, that the choir ought to go soul winning, that the ushers ought to go soul winning; but not me! I'm the guy who sits over here in the back, hidden and out of the way." Or, "I'm getting old; I've served my time. Besides, my arthritis hurts. Surely you don't mean me!"

But Jesus asks each of us, "Who is your master?"

Just so we'll not forget it, He gave us another story in Luke 16—the story of two men who died. One went to Heaven and the other went to Hell. It's not a parable but a real story.

Jesus said, "I want you to know that we're not just talking about sheep, coins and boys for the fun of it. We're talking about real people who die and go to an eternal Hell."

It is at this point that He throws us into chapter 17 and the verse, "We are unprofitable servants." What does that mean?

There are people sitting here saying, "Many in our church do a better job than I could ever do." We've made famous the saying, "Let George do it." But there are not enough Georges in the church.

Some fellow comes in and says, "I'm the greatest gift this church ever had. I can just do everything."

That guy will not amount to anything. He is going to be a lot of huff and puff, but I dare say, he talks a whole lot more than he walks. Often it turns out that way.

But the one who comes in and says, "I don't know whether you can use me; I don't know if I can be of any help; but if you ever need anything done, just remember that I'll be glad to do something," is probably that one who will be the greatest blessing. He says, "I am unprofitable, but I will do what I've been commanded to do. It is my duty to do it, and I will do it!"

The Responsibilities of Duty

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This passage makes very clear four things about duty:

1. Duty is never obscured by obstacles. You may say, "But I've been criticized. Some didn't like the way I made the visits." The fact is, duty is never obscured by obstacles; so welcome to the club. Others have been criticized, but criticism should never obscure your doing your duty.

You may say, "We wanted to have soul winning at our church, but we had opposition." Don't worry about opposition. You are not going to be voting on soul winning anyway. Just go do it! We don't vote on things that have already been voted on in Heaven. If God said do it, then don't have a business meeting over it!

You may say, "But folks don't like what we're doing." Never be surprised about such obstacles.

Verse 1 of chapter 17 says that offenses will come. You can do the best you can do, be the nicest you can be, but there will still be offenses.

Others may be foolish, but not you; others may faint in the process, but not you because you are locked into your duty. Never be afraid; just do your duty and trust God. The Lord is counting on you, and others are counting on you.

Obstacles are going to come—count on it; but do your duty. Offenses will come—count on it; but do your duty. Opposition will come—count on it; but do your duty.

2. Duty always observes the souls of men. Jesus said, "These little ones—you had better not offend them." You who sit around and carp about the kids who come on the buses, put a clamp on your tongue! In fact, if I read correctly, here He says that you would be better off to go out to a lake and drown yourself rather than offend those little ones!

You say, "The ones I was looking at weren't all that little." I don't care who they are, each is a precious soul. Don't offend even one of them. Go drown yourself if you must, but don't obstruct the winning of souls. It is your duty and mine to win them.

You say, "But they're just little fish." It matters not what kind of fish they are.

When we first moved to Mur-freesboro, we lived in the Rockvale area. There was a little man-made lake at the back of our house. I don't like to fish, but my son does. So because he likes to fish, I went out there with him occasionally with a rod and reel.

I would say, "Where should I throw it?"

Marlon would answer, "Right over there."

So I tossed it over there, reeled it in, and there was nothing on it. About the third time that happened I said, "All right, you guys. If you're going to get on that hook, you'd better get on. This is your chance." (You see, I'm not much of a fisherman. It's the same slack way some of us treat our unsaved friends!)

But every now and then, I would throw it out in the water, and a little bass would get on it. I would pull it in, hold it up and holler toward the house,

"Hey, Betty, I got one! I got one!"

My son would say, "Dad, put it back in the lake. It's not big enough to even bother with."

"But I got one! I got one!"

"Dad, it's not big enough to eat or to mount; it's not big enough for anything. Just take it gently off the hook and put it back in the lake."

"But, Son, I caught it! I caught it! It's mine!" (Are you hearing me?)

Of course, while fishing, he wants to catch big ones; and I guess with fishermen that's what you do. But when you're fishing in God's work and doing what He wants you to do, you make a big to-do about the little ones just like you do about the big ones. The little fish, the big fish—whoever they are—you don't throw them back and say they don't matter!

This man in Luke 16 said, "I have five brothers. Please don't let them come to this place of torment!" Duty under God sees every single one of them. And when you see it like God sees it, it will keep you going after them when there are snow and sleet, criticism and opposition.

Do what you have to do. Work and press on to do your duty. People are trusting us to do our job. God is counting on us. We must keep on fishing for souls!

3. Duty always operates by faith. This passage also talks about the faith as a grain of mustard seed.

Sometimes we say, "I don't have enough faith."

I'm going to tell you something: Even when you think you've got big faith, you haven't got much! It's not big faith that gets the job done; it's the little faith in a great God! You and I need to take the little mustardseed faith we have and put it toward the right thing. Faith in God gets the job done.

You say, "Well, I don't know if we can get these folks saved." Sure you can—if you put your faith in God.

You say, "I don't know if we're going to be able to pay all the bills around here." Yes, with a little faith and trust in God He will get you through.

Faith always feeds duty. You just say, "It's my duty to do it. I'll operate by faith. I know what God wants me to do."

Another will say, "But what happens if we go out here on the streets and give out Gospels of John and Books of Romans and salvation tracts? Why, I might fall on my face. I might be embarrassed."

Listen! Don't worry about such trivials. Just be willing to be embarrassed; just be willing to have someone slam the door; just be willing to listen when he says, "I don't want it." But you just go, go, go! Trust God and believe in Him. Just say, "I can and will do it because this is right. I'll follow God. He wants me to do it, so I will do it and trust Him by faith that I can do what He wants me to do!"

4. Duty openly serves. No man is worthy to serve the Saviour, but He lets us serve Him anyway. Glory to God! Whoever we are, He will use us.

O God, give us some people who will swallow their pride and give themselves up

with deep devotion and say, "Whatever it is, Lord, I will do whatever I can. I will do my duty. I will serve You out of love and devotion!"

God help us who have our minds, our health, our physical strength and can go at leisure and do whatever we want to do, yet we sit around and whine, moan, complain and make excuses: "Maybe next time, maybe next week."

You look at somebody with half your talent and wonder why God is using him like He is. Why? Because he is willing to go. He may not be much, but he will raise the flag for his Saviour and do what he can because it is his duty!

God help us! If we would put aside our pride and simply say, "I may not be the best in the house, but by the grace of God, I'll do what is my duty to do!"

It seems to me that it is my duty to believe every word in this Book, so I'll do my duty.

I think it's my duty to keep a warm heart, so I'll do my duty.

I think it's my duty to rejoice every day, so I'll do my duty.

I think it's my duty to walk with God, so I'll do my duty.

I think it's my duty to stay clean, so I'll do my duty.

I think it's my duty to give out gospel tracts, so I'll do my duty.

I think it's my duty to love sinners and to go soul winning, so I'll do my duty.

I think it's my duty to be in church on Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night, so I'll do my duty.

I think it's my duty to give tithes and gifts, so I'll do my duty.

I think it's my duty to run with the right crowd and to avoid the wrong crowd, so I'll do my duty.

I think it's my duty to support my pastor and be loyal to my church, so I'll do my duty.

I think it's my duty to stand against the enemy, so I'll do my duty.

I think it's my duty to pray and to be Spirit-filled, so I'll do my duty.

I think it's my duty to love what's right and hate what's wrong, so I'll do my duty.

I think it's my duty to separate myself from the world and live right, dress right, act right and smell right, so I'll do my duty.

I think it's my duty to represent my Lord well, so I'll do my duty.

The Lord is looking for some old, broken-down vehicles that are not so impressed with themselves, who will say, "Lord, I'm not much, but I'm willing to do whatever You say do." He's looking for someone who will say, "I'm an unprofitable servant, but I will do what is my duty."

Hear my appeal to you: Just do your duty! Today! Tomorrow! Next week! Next year!