

We Have Only Done Our Duty!

A sermon based on Luke 17:1-10

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Civic duty...what does that mean to you? Does that concept make you cringe? Does it instill in you a sense of patriotism?

Civic duty is often perceived as something owed to one's country or homeland or community. Civic duty might include things like: obeying the law, paying taxes, providing for a common defense, should the need arise, enrolling to vote and voting at all elections, serving on a jury, if called upon, going to the aid of victims of accidents and street-crime and testifying as a witness later in court, volunteering for public services, donating blood, to name several.

So, civic duty means I owe it to myself to slog through a presidential debate and read up on the candidates so I can be well-informed and can make the best decision for who I want to be our next president. It means I pay my taxes, although sometimes I grit my teeth as I do so because I may not necessarily agree with how the government is choosing to spend it. It means I gladly follow the laws God's representatives here have set down (of course, as long as they don't go against God's will). It means I'm even happier to show support for those who are working hard and fighting to protect that freedoms I have here. All of that plays into our civic duty, doesn't it?

But friends, let's not forget about our dual citizenship. We're here in the world, but not of the world. More importantly, we're citizens of heaven. What's our "civic" duty in that role?

John F. Kennedy, in his inaugural speech, said, **"Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."** Believers, today, we ask the same question of God, what we can do for him, and we know the answer. All we can do...all he wants us to do, is to do our duty.

Everything Jesus talked to his disciples about here in our verses, that details what their duty is to God. And that's our duty to God as well, what moral expectations from God we are under obligation to meet.

So, what does our duty to God look like? Here in our verses, there are three aspects to it. First, Jesus says **"watch yourselves"** so as not to **"cause one of these little ones to sin."** The word translated here as "things that cause people to sin," it's a Greek word which means a trigger in a trap. An animal walks into the trap and bumps against the trigger. The trap is sprung, and the animal is either caught or killed. Really, Jesus is getting at things we do (sinful or not) which cause offense...which can cause others to fall into the trap of sin themselves.

So, Jesus wants us to watch ourselves so that what we do (or don't do) doesn't cause "one of these little ones" to sin. Now, these "little ones" can mean children, but it isn't only children who can be led astray by us. It can happen to any believer and especially to believers who are still just beginning in their life as Christians and thus are like little children. Jesus wants us to be very careful not to cause anyone to sin. That's the first part of our duty to God.

The next? **"If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them."**

So, a fellow believer sins. It may not be a sin committed directly against you, for example, by hitting you

or calling you names. The sin may not even directly affect you. The believer may get drunk or steal something from someone else. But this makes no difference. That person is your brother or sister in Christ, and their sin puts their soul in danger. I want them...you want them to repent and seek the Lord's forgiveness. And when they do, we forgive them, no questions asked, no matter how many times they sin.

And the final part of our duty to God, as Jesus talks about here? It's our service to God and to others. Look again at the short parable Jesus shares about the master and his servant. The details of this parable are clear. It may seem to us that the master is hard on the "servant" (in the Greek, slave). But we have to look at this from the viewpoint of a master living in those days when slavery was part of life. If a man paid out a large amount of hard-earned money to buy a slave, he expected that slave to work for him. As long as there was work to be done, whether in the field or in the house, it was up to the slave to do it. The slave was to serve his master, not the master the slave. The master owed him nothing, not even a thank you, and the slave knew it.

That's how we serve God and others...not looking for or expecting anything in return. No, it's our duty to serve God, do as he commands us in his Word, and it's our duty to serve others...everyone else, caring about them, looking to their best interests.

To not cause offense (or for others to fall into sin), to forgive repeatedly those who repent, to serve God and others...that's our duty to God.

And...in a perfect world, the duty we carry out to our God would look precisely like that. Unfortunately, it's not a perfect world, and you and I aren't perfect, either.

You know, a few minutes ago, we talked about our civic duty, the obligations we have as citizens here...and again, in a perfect world, you'd have everyone eager to do their duty. But that's not what we see. The problem people have (and maybe that includes you, too) is the thought, "well, what do I owe to my country...a country that doesn't recognize or respect my rights...a government that doesn't keep it's word or promises...leaders who seem to care more about their political futures than about this country's future...my future?" All that, and an assortment of reasons, are keeping people from fulfilling their civic duties today.

What stops you from fulfilling your duty to God?

Friends, it's not easy, is it? Not only do I have to care about what I'm doing, to make sure I'm not sinning. I have to think about you and you and you and anyone else who might hear what I say or see what I'm doing or who might be affected by what I've done. I have to think about them? I have to watch myself so I'm not causing them offense, to fall into the trap of sin?

So, what I watch on TV, what I post on my Facebook, where I choose to spend my free time, what I say in conversations (that could be easily overheard or misconstrued as well), I have to be cognizant of what I'm doing and how that might cause someone else to sin? Sounds like a lot of work...too difficult. And especially when it doesn't look like anyone else seems to care about giving offense to others...makes it easy to have a careless attitude in that regard.

Or, this person, whom I care about...they just keep committing that same sin, doing the same thing, or they always seem to be screwing up against me just as often as I'm supposed to be forgiving them...and I

have to keep forgiving them. So, they can keep hurting me again and again....breaking my heart again and again, and I have to keep forgiving them. Let me know when you haven't gotten tired of doing that.

Or, they didn't even sin against me, but I know what he/she did, and it's on me to gently rebuke them, lead them to repentance. It's up to me, to confront them, even though they might get mad at me and tell me to mind my own business...when I could have said nothing, because, the way I figure it, it's not my business...it's not my problem.

Or, finally, serving God and serving others...caring enough about their needs, their wants...thinking about them before me, putting Jesus and his commands first in my life, considering and caring for others second, making my own wants and desires third...how often don't we have that order severely mixed up, with us on top?

What stops us from fulfilling our duty to God? Often, it's me....my sinful nature...sin itself. Listen again to Paul's words from our 2nd Lesson, ***"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!"***

When we do don't our duty to God, we are offering ourselves up as slaves to sin. But what benefit does doing that reap? Look at where it gets us? It gets us closer to death...eternal death.

Yes, ***"the wages of [that] sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** Luther once said that if in order to get to heaven we would have to pray the Lord's Prayer without once letting our thoughts wander, we could never be sure that we had done it. But when we admit, "God owes me nothing at all; in fact, I sin often and deserve only his punishment (and death)," then we realize that if we are to be saved, God must give us salvation as an undeserved gift.

Friends, taking off from President Kennedy's quote, we can ask what we can do for God, but when what we've done isn't good enough...then we ask what God can/has done for us.

And what God has done for us? His underserved gift? Grace through Jesus. When we were slaves to sin and death, God sent Jesus to be the Servant of the LORD. His duty, the prophet Isaiah tells us, was to ***"bring salvation to the ends of the earth."*** And here's what bringing salvation to you and me entailed: ***"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."***

Jesus, the perfect, sinless Lamb of God, who never caused offense, not even once, gave away his righteousness to you and me at the cross, where he was sacrificed to pay for our sins. That was his duty, and in spite of the death and the eternal punishment he knew he had to suffer, Jesus didn't shy away or dodge his obligations. He willingly went and suffered and died. And, Isaiah tells us, ***"after the suffering of his soul, he [saw] the light of life and [was] satisfied."*** Jesus, God's Servant, rose and was satisfied in his work....you and me, forgiven, without any hesitation, forgiven for all the times we still continue to sin against him.

And through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has saved us from slavery to sin...only to make us slaves to righteousness. But I think you'd agree with me, we're ok with that, because being slaves to righteousness...that leads to life.

So, since we're ok with that, being slaves to righteousness, being servants to the Lord, then how can we do our duty? How will we serve our Master? Again it's not easy. As Jesus spoke those words, his disciples felt the same inadequacy to be able to carry out their duty. So what did they say? "Increase our faith!"

That's our cry as well, "Jesus, increase our faith!" We too feel incapable of measuring up to the standards Jesus sets forth. We want greater faith to lay hold of the power to live up to his commands. And Jesus shows us we must depend more and more on God's grace alone to experience this increase of faith.

When we have the faith that we are saved because of what Jesus did for us, then when this Savior tells us to be careful not to give offense and to be ready to forgive always, to be ready to serve him and others always, we're happy to do what he tells us to do. Faith works that way. And God will work through our faith in him to carry out our duty to him.

You know, when all is said and done, every disciple...every one of us is [still] an unworthy servant in need of God's grace and forgiveness. But we're unworthy servants who have his grace and forgiveness...who are glad to do our duty.

One of the core values for the army is duty. I did some reading about this sense of duty online, and here's what I found, "**Duty begins with everything required of you by law, regulation, and orders; but it includes much more than that. As a professional do your work not just to the minimum standard, but to the very best of your ability. Commit to excellence in all aspects of your professional responsibility so that when the job is done [you] can look back and say, "I couldn't have given any more."**

Friends, we are the church militant, still fighting the battle against sin here. We are God's servants, having the opportunity and the duty to serve God our entire lives. Moved by the grace of God, with our faith increased and strengthened by him, we will do our duty to him, not because of what we expect to gain for our faithful service but because of what is already ours through him. And through it all, we will humbly say, "***We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.***"

And God says to you, "Well, done, good and faithful servant. Well done." Amen.