

Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



February 2, 2014

Doing Our Duty

In our role as servants of God, our purpose is not to accrue bragging rights about our accomplishments. Instead, our duty is simply to press on with the work God has assigned us.

"And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'" (Lk. 17:7-10).

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This odd little parable follows immediately Jesus' teaching concerning forgiveness and—in view of the difficulty of meeting that obligation—the apostles' request to Jesus to "increase our faith" (v. 1-6). If only we had the faith to forgive those who sin against us, how noble our service to God would be!

Not so fast, Jesus warns us. The master-servant relationship upon which Jesus builds this parable may seem harsh

to modern American sensibilities, but to His original audience the story made perfect sense. The role of the servant consists of only one obligation: to serve the master. If the servant comes into the house after a long day in the field and the master orders him to prepare his evening meal, the servant has no choice but to comply. Only when the master's needs are fully met can the servant tend to his own affairs. Even then, the master does not owe his servant so much as a "thank you." It's just another day in the life of a servant—doing his duty.

That spirit of humility, Jesus tells us, is how we ought to view our service to God. At no point in our life of faith can we call God's attention to our hard work and sacrifices, demanding, "Look at me! Aren't I doing a great job?!" Instead, we should see our lives as perpetually unfinished business, always ready to do more, learn more, serve more. Until the Lord calls us home, we are only unprofitable servants, forever in debt to a gift we can never repay.

Jesus is not portraying God as a heartless master who treats our service

with disdain. In an earlier parable, He spoke of the master (God) welcoming his servants to a feast, where he will "gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them" (Lk. 12:37). In *that* parable, the emphasis is on the Master's generosity; *here*, it's on the servants' duty. Jesus is pushing a single lesson: when we lose sight of our life of service and develop a sense of entitlement, we lose our effectiveness.

Recall the forgiveness-and-faith issue that prompted this parable: Suppose that forgiving others is a challenge for us, and somehow we overcome that obstacle and learn how to forgive. That's great! But remember, that's only a tiny part of all God wants us to do. There will be another challenge—and another, and another. Instead of boasting of past victories won, we need to keep our eyes fixed on the journey ahead of us, and keep on humbly responding to the tasks that God places before us.

Someday there will be a time for resting and reflecting on what we've accomplished. Until then, our attention must be set on doing our duty.

– David King