

"The Call Of Duty"

I once read a story that emerged from World War I of a soldier who became so discouraged and defeated during the war that he went AWOL and deserted his fellow troops in the heat of a battle. The soldier made his way to a nearby house and exchanged his uniform for the clothing of a common farmer. From there, he decided to find the coast in the hope of catching a boat that would enable him to get back to his homeland in England. In the darkness of the night, he became lost and struck a road sign as he walked. The soldier had no idea where he was or what the sign said. He decided to climb the pole hoping to find words on the sign that would tell him where he was and where to go. When he got to the crossbeam, he held on to read the sign. Taking out a match, he lit it, and looked directly in the face of Jesus Christ. He had climbed an outdoor crucifix! Stunned at what he saw, the soldier now realized the shame on his life. He was looking into the face of the One who had endured it all and had never turned back. The next morning, the soldier was found back in the trenches with his fellow troops.

In our generation, there is a growing epidemic plaguing far too many of our churches that I call quit-itis. Whether it is because of doubts, defeat, discouragement, or disillusionment, it does not take long to recognize the fact we are raising a generation of Alka-Seltzer Christians. After you dip them into water, they fizzle for a short while, and then they quickly disappear. You can tell a lot about man by what it takes to make him quit. Solomon was a man whose life was marked by periods of unquestioned devotion and periods of unsettling disloyalty. By the end of his life, he discovered many of his pursuits in life had only produced emptiness and dissatisfaction. Out of his doubts and speculations, he reaches the noble conclusion in Ecclesiastes 12:13, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." Our duty does not have as much to do with our labors as it does our living conscious of God and our loving commitment to God. So few are able to finish what they start spiritually because they are trying to accomplish in their work for God what can only be produced by their walk with God. John Calvin wrote, "He who disregards his calling will never keep the straight path in the duties of his work." Our calling is to walk intimate with God, and anything less is the making of a life destined for treason. Just how do we respond to our call of duty?

There is **an obedience to be expected**. In John 1:43, we are told Jesus, "...findeth Phillip, and saith unto him, Follow Me." This is a phrase Jesus often used in calling would-be disciples, but it was stated in a manner that called for immediate obedience. Jesus knew that true belief demonstrates itself in obedient action. When a parent is leading a child across a lighted intersection, there is an allotted amount of time before the light changes colors releasing the traffic. For the child to delay, deviate, or be distracted can spell disaster. The loss of immediate obedience always produces consequences that result in the loss of spiritual privilege. In the Parable of the Great Supper, those invited to come gave excuses and were told, "none of those...shall taste of My supper." The three half-hearted followers that gave verbal willingness to follow Jesus but had more pressing matters at hand were told they were not "...fit for the Kingdom of God." The rich young ruler could not give up his riches to follow Jesus, and "went away sorrowful" without eternal life. Puritan preacher William Secker wrote, "It is our bounden duty to live in obedience, but it would prove our utter ruin to live on obedience." We are never prepared to follow God faithfully where we do not strive to obey God fully.

There is **an opportunity to be embraced**. In Joshua 3:3, the Lord is preparing to lead Israel into the Promise Land when this command was given, "...When ye see the ark of the covenant...remove from your place, *and go after it*." The ark was symbolic of God's presence and glory among His people, and the people were told to follow because "...tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." The rising of the morning sun would present a day filled with miracles and memories, and God did not want His people to miss it. However, taking advantage of the opportunity would be dependent upon moving into position to see it all. Imagine how the soldiers who went home must have felt when they heard all God had done for Gideon's small army that stayed. Imagine how the Lord's disciples who went into hiding felt when they heard Mary's testimony that the tomb of Jesus was empty. Far too often, our lives are like a ship out of position to catch the wind and tide, thus leaving us to drift aimlessly from storm to storm never knowing all was safe in the harbor. No wonder Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle wrote, "Our grand business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand." A life that stays

intimate with God is a life that will always be rich in golden opportunities.

There is **an overflow to be enjoyed**. In Matthew 14:29, the disciples are caught at sea in a tumultuous storm, and Jesus comes walking on the water. Hearing Peter's desire to be with Him, Jesus said, "Come. And...he walked on the water, to go to Jesus." Jesus frequently used the word "come," and there is little sense of any forcefulness being spoken. In fact, Jesus used it as a gentle, tender invitation to be near to Him. In His presence, children felt comfortable, the weary found comfort, the rejected found acceptance, and the broken were made whole. Seventeenth-century minister John Flavel wrote, "Those who give to God only the shadow of duty can never expect from Him a real reward." However, the real reward we receive is not the blessings that come from His hand, but rather the pleasure of intimately knowing Him. To linger in His presence is to be capsized by the overflow of peace, love, and joy from His heart. The psalmist wrote in Psalm 16:11, "...In Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore." To remain at a distance, a man may only know that in principle but never in reality. Only those who dare to stand close to the waterfall will ever be privileged to feel the spray of the mist.

Our duty of walking with God is not as much an obligation as it is the obedience of finishing what you start. A professor of history once noted, "If Columbus had turned back, nobody would have blamed him – but nobody would have remembered him either." Those lives that blazed trails before us and have stood the test of time are those who became conscious of God's presence, and they never lost that consciousness the rest of their lives. But, what a blessing it is to know if I ever lose my way, the Lord will always provide a sign that brings me back to the trenches of His love!

Your Most Proud Pastor,
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