

February 9, 2009
Men, it's time for duty!

Dear Friends,

One of the most fascinating points about the parables Jesus relates is their timeless nature for all generations. For example, let's look at Luke 17:7-10 to discover what He's telling us today to apply to our lives. This parable presents a servant who has labored hard all day in his master's field. When he comes in for the day, however, his work isn't finished! He's called upon to make supper for his master, and get cleaned up and serve him. This is part of his duty as a servant/slave. His master owns him and has the right to command his obedience.

Now take note of a key element of this story. There's no room for a begrudging attitude nor even an expectation of gratitude from the master, since both the slave as well as the master recognize the nature of their relationship. When the slave has fulfilled all his responsibilities to his master, *then* he can consider his own needs and refresh himself. Jesus, *our* Master and Lord, concludes the parable by emphasizing to *all of us* the correct and righteous attitude we need to have as we fulfill our part in His Kingdom: ***"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'"*** (Luke 17:10). Did you notice the heart response of *humility* that's captured in *doing the duty* we're called to carry out? Having been cleansed by our Father through confession and repentance, we are ***"set apart and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work"*** (2 Timothy 2:21).

A vital relational component has been forgotten or neglected by so many Christians today: the God-given reality that *fulfilling our duty* to our gracious Lord is necessary to authentic, biblical faith. This responsive obedience factor of our trust walk defines the *wisdom* that permeates God's Word: ***"Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock"*** (Matthew 7:24). The "duty" of responsive obedience separates those who *talk* about their religion from those who interconnect their trust *with action*: "Show ***me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works ... As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead"*** (James 2:2:18,26). God's Word repeatedly directs His called-out ones to practice wisdom in their lives. And what is wisdom? Fulfilling our duty to our beloved Lord by obeying His good and righteous commands!

Many years ago a study exposed the woeful fruit of Nicolaitan clergy: **lethargic and spiritually unproductive passivity in their congregants**. Clergy-dominated services produce *spectators* rather than eager participants whose duty is to strengthen and edify one another as is expected of those called-out by the Spirit: ***"Whenever you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a teaching, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification"*** (1 Corinthians 14:26). Because so many choose to rely on their clergy person to "do all things" for them, their spiritual lives are *vicarious*. They depend on what they see God doing in other people's lives or on what they read. Their identity as "Christian" is found in the size of their congregation,

the popularity or perceived piety of their clergy, or the intensity of their allegiance to their denominational creed. Beyond the scope of their awareness is the intimacy of identifying with their beloved Master in purposefully fulfilling His commands in loving service.

In **Lifeyte 32. God's Warning For Today — “The Many Faces of Idolatry”**, we offer an anecdote that represents a large part of westernized Christendom:

Several years ago the senior pastor of one of the larger congregations in Connecticut came on a personal retreat to our center for a few days.

I was interested in how biblical processes operated on such a large scale so I asked him,

“How do you get people to participate when there are so many in your congregation?”

“We *don't* want participation,” he answered. “As the church grows, we *hire new staff*.” At that time they had 21 paid staff.

The sense of *Kingdom duty* to our beloved King has all but disappeared from western Christianity. Perhaps you are one of those who has never responded to His call for duty as a soldier, a farmer, an athlete (2 Timothy 2:3-6). What's so depressing is how many older men have fallen prey to self-imposed "retirement" from that which our Lord commands of them. Just a few years ago we traveled throughout the country doing seminars on the Hebraic foundations. How our hearts grieved that we found only a few older, non-clergy men who were serving others in any kind of leadership capacity in their faith family.

Most heartrending for us was a particular memory. As we finished our research in Israel, our Father told us that the entire Hebraic Restoration rises or falls on whether older men take on their biblical role as elder/shepherds of His children. All our Spirit-directed and -empowered efforts over these years ride on this one factor:

Whether older men can throw off the years of being deceived by man-centered, man-serving religion

and serve in their God-given duty to Him in the lives of younger people.

This is the *wisdom* His Word calls for, the obedience that fulfills purposes and evidences authentic faith.

What can we learn from the history of Christianity?

First, we realize that **there were no clergy in the early Church**. The Church our *Lord Jesus is building* is not based on religious leaders intent on self-fulfillment as they tell others how to live. Far from it! His own appraisal of those who *served themselves* in their religious profession was, "Hypocrites!"

From the time of Moses (Exodus 3:16) our Father has always selected older men, **family leaders**, to represent Him to their extended spiritual kin. The Newer Testament

continues this pattern as older men, wise elders (*zakenim*), were looked to for guidance for each **extended faith family**(Titus 1:5). Their ultimate purpose was to serve their beloved Lord in *His Kingdom work*, and to help each person in their care to press on toward the narrow gate. And isn't this what our Father is restoring to us today? Faithful and compassionate older men of wisdom who will care as shepherds for His spiritual flock? This is the God-given duty of every older man in Christ to be true to his Lord in this privileged responsibility, whether to just one younger man or to several. Remember, our God's words are *not* "divine suggestions"!

The history of Christianity openly discloses that professional clergy didn't appear until **persuasive, anti-Semitic Hellenist philosophers** entered Christendom in the second and third centuries. These men, many erroneously revered as "Church Fathers", introduced and securely affixed the pagan practices that make up most of contemporary westernized Christendom: a young, seminary-trained clergy class; steeple-adorned buildings lined with pews; a pulpit (often elevated) to set apart the clergy from the rest of the congregation; trained choirs that forestall spontaneous praise by the flock; celebration of "Christian" holidays with trappings and practices that originated as heathen observances.

Tragically displaced were the wise older men who led the children of God as family leaders. No longer did those who faithfully walked in Jesus' steps gather together in one another's homes to pray, fellowship, share in communion, discuss for application God's Word, and encouragingly uphold communal righteousness — practices that eventually became cause for persecution and death at the hands of the religious regime. What was at one time *extended spiritual family* with Jesus as their Head became a hierarchical organization run by a religious ruling class.

The extreme anti-Semitism of so many "Church Fathers" was a *curse* thrust upon the children of Abraham, the man promised by God to herald blessings upon the whole world: ***"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"*** (Genesis 12:3). For example, seeds of virulent hate were sown in the widely read *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*. Penned by Justin Martyr (AD 160), one of the most respected Church Fathers, this brief document claimed that the Jews richly deserved to be destroyed for crucifying Christ. God was through with Jews, claimed Justin. His gracious promises *to Israel* now applied only to Christians, while His *curses* were pointed directly at the Jews. (Tragically, such revisionism totally missed the biblical reality that *our sins* hung Jesus on the cross. We *all* richly deserve curse apart from the atoning blood of the Lamb.)

As long as the institution of Christianity has "cursed" the children of Abraham, it has been "cursed" by God as He promised. He never has forsaken Abraham's sons (Romans 11:1,2)! In fact, we are living at a time when two very great promises have been fulfilled — the nation of Israel was *restored in one day* during May of 1948 as prophesied (Isaiah 66:8); and Jerusalem was returned to the Jews in 1967 after nearly 2000 years of Gentile control (Luke 21:24). The "curse" of Hellenist pagan/philosophical influence and Romanist organizational hierarchy is being exposed to those who want to

restore the biblical foundations of relational priorities and obedient trust as a way of life.

But what is holding back many from fleeing this curse? Too many of you *men* have been duped into passivity by relying on clergy to fulfill your God-given spiritual responsibilities within your family. You can't believe that God could allow people to taste the curse of religious distortion for so many centuries. But consider this poignant example of what God has thrust upon all but a remnant of Jews for so many centuries because of their unbelief: ***"God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they should not see and ears so that they should not hear, to this very day"***(Romans 11:8). Stony refusal to bow before Messiah Jesus has veiled Jewish eyes even now: ***"I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery [this truth which God formerly concealed but has now revealed], brothers, lest you should be wise in your own opinion. Hardness in part has happened to Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in"*** (Romans 11:25).

If you were Jewish, how would you react to realizing what *God* has done to you for all these centuries? And don't think, as many Gentiles do, "That's the Jews. I became a Christian when I was 6, so I'm "saved" no matter how I live!" *Your life* proves if you're abiding in authentic belief, or if you are playing religious games. Beware the *presumption of unbelief* — thinking that labeling yourself Christian is sufficient in God's sight even while your life denies *His Lordship* over you (Romans 11:20-24). Far too many Israelites relied on being God's "chosen people" yet by their sinful life choices disqualified themselves as His own.

The history of Christianity reveals further proof that God can allow a curse to continue for centuries. By the 4th century, the politically-aligned Romanized church institution had far removed itself from the biblical foundations of Lord Jesus and the apostles. Neither the Bible nor the early Church writings substantiated the "throne of Peter" as papal authority, nor the elevation of the apostles or others who followed Jesus to be revered and prayed to as "saints". The *Hebrew Scriptures* overflow with references to "saints" being those who live in obedient trust in God as His set-apart people. That is the underlying apperception behind Newer Testament writers referring to Jesus' faithful ones as "saints"!

However, because of strident anti-Semitism in Christendom, God allowed the Roman Empire political system that had conquered much of the world to become the pattern for the Church hierarchical organization. Pontifex Maximus, the title of the pagan god-emperors, became the Roman Pontiff, the Pope. It wasn't long afterward that the organized Church and all of the Holy Roman Empire plunged into the Dark Ages. For over 1,100 years God permitted the Bible to be hidden in Latin, a language understood only by the very few scholarly ecclesiastics. For all these years God allowed His Word to be kept from everyday people.

Please don't fret about what God does according to His own will. He doesn't have to justify Himself to anyone! But you do have to render account for fulfilling your duty to Him as His beloved called-out one. Even as it's our Father's timing to restore the Jews

to Israel as He promised, He is at the same time restoring the Hebraic foundations to Gentile followers of His Son. How is He going about this? Our Lord is recruiting *mature men in particular* to help restore the Hebraic foundations of His earliest followers — His relational priorities and call to obedience to His Word and to His Spirit. The highest call of a man in the earliest church was to shepherd our Father's children as a wise biblical elder (*zaken*). This role as a faithful family leader was reserved for wise older men in Christ and is being restored among extended spiritual families today. Younger men, it's time to prepare yourselves so that you can fulfill this privileged duty that God is calling you to when you come of age and have been sufficiently prepared by the Spirit of Christ within you.

"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a road in the desert and rivers in the wasteland" (Isaiah 43:19).

Are you among those who've been deceived by your religious leaders into believing that God no longer brings forth revelation to His people? Many denominations have stunted the spiritual life of congregants by declaring that God ceased revealing truth to His people when the Biblical canon was complete or when their own denominational creed was established. How tragic! Such teaching *nullifies* the command of God for husbands to love their wives by seeking His *rhema*, His revealed will, for them (Ephesians 5:25,26). Followers of Lord Jesus find spiritual nourishment through ***"every word [rhema] that proceeds from the mouth of God"*** (Matthew 4:4). As you seek Him earnestly through prayer and in His Word, His Spirit brings forth those promptings and words of His will that direct your path. Isn't *that* revelation?

Our Father is presently revealing and restoring the truths that enabled the earliest followers of Jesus to be so spiritually powerful and relationally intimate. When you embrace that which our heavenly Father is restoring, you're not only revitalizing your own spiritual life. You're also strengthening and encouraging through your relational influence those He desires you as a wise elder to lead as extended family in Christ. He is calling His people to be poured out as *streams of living water* (John 7:38,39) in the wasteland of darkness and despair around us. If the Spirit of Christ is abiding in you, you are privileged with an awesome responsibility of loving obedience! You can't go on ignoring your duty to Him as a called-out soldier by living in the passive complacency into which religion lulls you.

You older men and women have experienced failed expectations from your years of Christian religion. Our generation and subsequent ones were duped into thinking that *someone else*, whether public schools, youth groups or Sunday school classes, would pass along moral and spiritual values to our children. How wrong we all were! As we've traveled around the country sharing Restoration truths, there's hardly a grandparent we've met whose family has not been touched by divorce. So, what can be done?

The pain and sorrow of children from broken homes has not gone unnoticed by our

Father. He is recruiting faithful men of wisdom and compassion whom He can use to care for His suffering ones and help undo this societal catastrophe. As He dispels the curse of Greco/Roman distortion of biblical truth, He is revealing the foundations embraced by those who first trusted Jesus. Father God is looking for men who love Him foremost and are humble enough to obey Him no matter what the cost—even to leaving the accursed clergy system behind in order to walk in His power as authentic elders. Are *you* one of these called-out men?

Over the years our Father has guided and empowered us to produce materials that will prepare you to shepherd His children. All are a free download at our website.

1. **Pastoring By Elders** <<http://www.restorationministries.org/html/pbe.html>>.
2. **Jesus In Your Home Video Series** (especially Section 4. The Home Fellowship) <<http://www.restorationministries.org/html/JIYH.html>>.
3. **Restoring the Early Church** <<http://www.restorationministries.org/html/rtec.html>>.
4. Our 50-lesson series, **Discussing How to Restore the Early Church** <<http://www.restorationministries.org/html/RTEClessons.html>>.

If you're a man whose heart yearns to gratefully serve our Lord, then we encourage you to use any or all of these materials. As you know from your study of Scripture, our Sovereign King doesn't accept excuses from anyone. This is His divine timing as He is restoring the Jews to Israel according to His promises and is bringing to light the Hebraic foundations upon which Lord Jesus is building His Church. You don't want to be standing at the Judgment Throne having wasted your years hiding in religion rather than faithfully fulfilling His will as He extends His Kingdom on earth. But keep in mind that there's a cost — one that every person who has walked faithfully in His steps in obedient trust has faced: ***"You will be hated by all men because of My name...In your endurance you will gain your souls"*** (Luke 21:17-19, literal translation).

This rejection for standing firm in the Lord Jesus of the Bible won't necessarily come from the world at large. In fact, as with the earliest believers, those who are enmeshed in *organized religion* will be the ones who self-righteously toss you out and even persecute you: ***"They will put you out of [your faith community]; but an hour is coming that everyone killing you will think he is offering a service to God"*** (John 16:2). We've personally experienced betrayal and repudiation in our service to our Lord. There have been 'Demases' (2 Timothy 4:10) among our relationships who couldn't face the rejection that comes with living wholeheartedly for Jesus and sought to compromise with the world's standards. And we've known 'Hymenaeuses and Alexanders' (1 Timothy 1:19,20) who shipwrecked their faith. They were so concerned with being accepted by the world that they ignored their conscience and brought down the name of God by their sinful lifestyles.

"I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth" (Job 40:4).

How very different are God's ways from man's! Our Lord doesn't choose those who are great by the world's standards to do His will (Luke 10:21). Rather, His instruments are

people who appear foolish to the world, and those who don't think God could ever use them (1 Corinthians 1:26-30). These are the ones now being recruited to do their part in restoring the Hebraic foundations.

When we were finishing our time in Israel, we visited a small, rustic retreat center near Latrun, a few miles outside Jerusalem. About 4 AM on our final morning there, I (Mike) climbed upstairs to the rock-hewn chapel to gripe to God about why He had chosen us to share the Hebraic foundations. Full of self-doubt and inadequacy from our past, we sure wouldn't have recruited us! I poured my heart out to my Lord Jesus as the darkness was swallowed by the dawn, reminding Him of how much I had failed Him. "Why don't you use my two brothers?" I lamented. "They're really reliable, while I've been like a spiritual yoyo before you." Suddenly, the Spirit of Jesus diverted me to a little devotional booklet on a nearby stool. I opened it to the lesson for that day:

"Woe to me!" I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.' Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.' Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for Us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!' (Isaiah 6:5-8).

Only the grace of our glorious King can open blind eyes that are focused on inner guilt and past failure, and then widen them to see both His forgiving love and purpose for His selection. Sobbing uncontrollably, I whispered, "**You do this to everyone you recruit!**" As a result of this intimate and joyous encounter, I've made an important discovery in my walk with my Lord Jesus: I am without doubt totally unworthy, but thankfully, His use of me depends on HIS worthiness and plan! That wondrous realization has stirred in me a greater determination to encourage others to be *prepared and available* for God's use of them! A repentant heart makes all the difference to our Lord.

The mission for which our Lord was recruiting us was established on His call to Isaiah, which became *rhema* for us through His Spirit: ***'Whom shall I send? And who will go for Us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'*** This call to awaken others to His restored foundations has not found a large, receptive audience. You may want to read verses 9 and 10 of Isaiah chapter 6, verses apperceived by Jesus in Matthew 13:14,15. Our Father was recruiting us to a difficult ministry — to share with many who refuse to hear as stubbornly as did Isaiah's Israelites. There was a purpose for our Lord so often summing up His parables and dictating Revelation letters with this warning, ***"if you have ears to hear, then hear!"*** This repeated phrase is an imperative, a command, a non-optional directive that means to listen closely with the intent of following through in obedience. In other words, *take action* according to the will of our Father — do your duty!

We came back to the United States as the Church Growth Movement and its deceit that downplayed sin and the biblical necessity to repent had begun to gain widespread

acceptance. The essence of its success appealed to the flesh's desire to compromise with the world: "Because God is ALL loving, He accepts you and wants you to be happy." That definitely was not the message He gave us in Jerusalem! He commanded us to remind followers of Jesus of their duty — their responsibility as His beloved Kingdom bondservants — to serve Him in their marriage, their family, and their fellowship family. To most people today, *duty* is a negative four-letter word. So many who have been deceived through false gospels consider themselves "Christian" but don't have the Spirit of Christ. Therefore they're not able to discern the truth of love-grounded, responsive obedience to God's good and gracious commands and ways (1 John 2:3-6).

Thankfully, our Lord warned us while we were at Latrun that what we'd be sharing would not be readily embraced by those who were satisfied with religious systems and practices. In fact, only a few would have ears to hear about the Hebraic foundations until the "**Dark Days of Chastisement**" come on the United States. You probably have little doubt that this season may soon be upon this nation.

We share this last point if you have ears to hear and a heart intent on obeying our Father's will: Don't be plagued by a false expectation that because these truths emanate from our Father, people in your relational arena will welcome you and receive them. Far from it! As many of you have already found, to stand steadfast in Jesus and His Word is a choice that often leads to isolation for a while. That happens not because you have made yourself inaccessible, but because you've been rejected by those who don't want to hear about their responsive duty to our Lord that's part and parcel of a love relationship with Him. Yet if you've chosen to follow Jesus in Spirit and in truth, can anything be greater than being true to our Lord no matter what it costs you? (Revelation 12:11)

Rejoicing with you in our life journey with Him,
Mike & Sue