

Beyond the Call

Jesus is remembered and revered as the good shepherd, because he voluntarily took on himself, that which no one could possibly have demanded. It is this sense, that his cross, touches our lives, at every point, and influences every relationship.

A student discovers the joy of learning, when he places demands upon himself, which no teacher could ever require. Family life takes on beauty and meaning, when husband and wife, parents, and children, begin to give of themselves, in ways, which no law on earth could demand. A person's work becomes a privilege, and a pleasure, when he stops thinking in terms of minimal requirements, and begins to function in that realm, above and beyond the call of duty.

Certainly, we should recognize, that all genuine Christian living belongs in this class. It consists in breaking free from, and rising above, all legalism, to do that which no law can require, or no person can demand. This is the very essence of the life and teaching of Jesus. "Whoever would compel you, to go with him for one mile, go two." That is a summation of his total philosophy. Whatever life demands of me, I will overcome, by giving and doing more.

"If you love those who love you, what reward can you expect? The tax collectors, do as much."
"Love your enemies" – that is something above, and beyond, the call of duty.

In every country, and every community, there are essentially, three groups of people. First, there are those who refuse to face up to duty. These are the lawless ones, who must be dealt with through penal codes and courts of law. Then there are those, who do their duty, and nothing more. They are the law-abiding. Their standard of conduct comes from without – that which custom and society requires. Third, there are those whose standard of behavior, comes from within. They require of themselves, that which no legal system could ever require. These are the people, who bear the brunt of the load, and give strength of character to church, to community, and to nation. But do not pity them, as martyrs, for it is also they, who know the fulfillment of life, which can only be found, above and beyond.

Finally, consider, that this quality of living, confronts us with the need for personal Christianity.

If a person is going to move in the realm, beyond the call of duty, something must happen to him on the inside. No one can hire, or bribe, or compel, a person to live as Christ lived. Only Christ living within, can cause him to do that. This is the only explanation of a beautiful life, such as spoken of by the apostle Paul. He wrote, to the Galatians, "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives within me; and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith to the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

When a person feels, that something has been done for him, so great, that he can never pay back the debt, it does something to his life, which nothing else can do. This is the message of our reading today. "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. No one takes it from Him; He lays it down freely, of Himself." That kind of sacrifice, calls for living above and beyond the call.

Then we shall bow in humble adoration and there proclaim, My God, How Great Thou Art