



## THE GIFT OF LABOR

---

### LUKE 7 : 1 - 10

Luke 7:1 - 10 (NIV) 1When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. 2There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. 3The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. 4When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, 5because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." 6So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. 7That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 8For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." 9When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." 10Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

Luaine and I owned our own business for 12 ½ years. Through those years we employed many different people. Some I highly regarded as good workers, and some I did not.

Some constantly needed supervision—they didn't seem to know even how to look busy, or they were too busy talking to one another to take care of the customers.

Others were productive. They knew exactly how to treat customers with respect and "the customer is always right" attitude.

I had to constantly prod some to wait on a customer. Was I expecting too much? I paid their wages—they worked for me. I expected my employees to dress appropriately, the way I, their boss, preferred. I expected every employee to represent not only me, but also our business, in the very best light in the community.

Some of my former employees stand out. They were worthy workmen, whom I valued highly. There were others who, even today, I would not give them a recommendation. What makes this sad is that I primarily hired Christian individuals.

The focus of this passage is v. 9—Jesus was amazed at the faith of the Gentile Centurion. His faith was real and almost tangible. It was a lesson to the Jews surrounding Jesus.

But today, let's focus on v. 2, "There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die."

This is an amazing verse! Slaves were nothing more than property. In Roman law a slave was defined as just a tool—a living tool; he had no rights; his master could beat him, treat him badly, and even kill him if he chose.

It was recommended to farmers of that day to examine their farm implements every year and to throw out the old and broken ones, and to do the same with their slaves.

Aristotle wrote about the friendships that were possible in life. He said, "There can be no friendship nor justice towards inanimate things; indeed, not even towards a horse or an ox, nor yet towards a slave as a slave. For master and slave have nothing in common; a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave." (Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 1, p.302)

It was quite normal to toss a slave out to die when they were no longer able to do the work. Yet here was a slave highly regarded by his master.

How did the centurion hear of Jesus? Was the slave a Christian? Did he influence the Roman officer toward Jesus? As I thought of this highly valued slave, I thought, here's a guy who wasn't a complainer and whiner. He wanted to do a good job for his master, and he worked hard at it. He was a "worthy workman."

He gave an honest day's work. He was diligent and did the best he knew how. He didn't spend more time on coffee breaks than on his job. He had a job to do, and he did it to the very best of his abilities.

Ask yourself, "Am I a highly valued workman?" Do others look at you and know you are a conscientious worker?

If you are an employer, do you work as hard as or harder than those who work for you? Are you fair and conscientious to your employees? Do you look out for their welfare?

Maybe you're retired. That has nothing to do with it. The greatest potential army a church has are retired Christians. Being retired should free you up for more ministry and service in the church. Only aging should slow you down.

Whether young or old, a Christian who has a bad attitude about work and bad work habits—who is a complainer and whiner—is a poor representative and witness for Christ in this world.

Think about this, a Christian with lousy work habits and attitudes has the same testimony as a Christian who smokes and drinks.

Sometimes we have to be reminded that work is good. It is not the result of sin. Work is part of God's creation. It is a gift from Him to us.

## 1. Work is sacred

The first thing to understand is that God gave us work. It is not punishment for sin. God worked in creating the world. He works at sustaining the world.

The Bible says, Gen 2:15 (NIV) "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." Adam and Eve were put in the Garden to work—to take care of that paradise.

They hadn't eaten the forbidden fruit yet. They were still in perfect fellowship with the Creator, and work was part of that.

In Exo 23:12 (NIV) we read, "Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed."

Proverbs is full of admonitions about work: Prov 10:5 (NIV) "He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son."

Prov 12:11(NIV) "He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment."

Prov 20:13 (NIV) "Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare."

The Bible makes it clear, work is sacred. As Christians our approach and attitudes toward work are a testimony to all around us.

## 2. Work has purpose

Because God gave us work, and because it is sacred, it stands to reason that there is a reason for work—that there is purpose for it.

Too often we let our beliefs and feelings about work be shaped by the world. We buy into the

idea that work is has just an economic concept—to better ourselves with money and material things.

After all, Jesus did say, Luke 10:7 (NIV) “the worker deserves his wages.” A good worker does deserve good wages, but a Christian doesn’t work just for the wages.

The Apostle Paul wrote, 1 Th 4:11-12 (NIV) “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, 12so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.”

Our work habits are a testimony to the world. Good Christian workers are an example to others. But Paul also emphasized that we work in order not to be dependent on others. A lazy Christian is not a good example, is not a good testimony and witness.

Work is given to us from God. Work is theological. It was born in God’s divine mind. It is given to us for our good—it is good for us, physically and mentally to work.

It is given to us so that we can take care of ourselves and our families. It is given so that we can teach our children the value of labor. It is given to us so that we will not be a burden on others and, at the same time, so that we can help others who are having difficulties.

Too often we miss this part of it. Too often we see work as a drudgery, a daily grind, a treadmill. We are like the old man who said, “I dig ditches to get the money to buy the bread to get the strength to dig the ditches.”

But Paul said, Acts 20:35 (NIV) “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

And in Eph 4:28 (NIV) “He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.”

The ultimate purpose of life is God reaching out to people. God cares for people. You and I have been chosen to reflect that care and love.

As part of the family of humanity who belong to God, we must strive to set proper Christian examples through our work. We belong to God, and all that we have belongs to Him.

Yes, we are our brother’s keeper. If you want to experience real joy, then understand that work is God’s gift to us. No matter what our honorable work is, there is purpose for it.

### 3. We should be thankful for work

Are you thankful for work? How should we be thankful? For one thing, work gives us something to do, and it keeps us busy and out of trouble? The saying is idle hands are the devil's workshop.

Be thankful that you can support yourself and family and that your needs are being met?

Be thankful that you can support God's church? Be thankful that you are supporting missionaries all over the world? Be thankful that you are helping those who are not as fortunate as you are?

I challenge you to be thankful for work, for real, meaningful, and contributing work. Work is a gift from God. It has purpose. It should cause you to be thankful. Thank God for this wonderful gift of work.

#### Application:

Keep your work in perspective. It is a good gift from God. Be thankful for it. Be diligent in it. Have a good, godly perspective of work. And remember, work was never intended to dominate your life to the point that God is excluded, or your health is ruined, or your family is neglected.