

In the book One Crowded Hour, Tim Bowden wrote about the 1964 war between Malaysia and Indonesia. At a pivotal point in the war, the British (who were helping Malaysia) sent an officer to ask a tribal group named the Gurkhas for help with a special mission. They were politically autonomous and didn't have to participate in the war - although they often agreed to help when asked. So, the British officer asked them to help with a mission that involved jumping out of airplanes behind enemy lines and fighting their way back to the front to make an opening for the British to exploit. After talking about it, they unexpectedly rejected the request. The next day, however, one of their leaders sought out the British officer who made the request, and explained that they had discussed the matter further and would jump under certain conditions.

*"What are the conditions?"* the British officer asked. *"The landing site has to be marshy,"* the Gurkha leader said, *"or at least not be rocky."* The British officer explained that the drop zone would be a jungle, so that wasn't a problem. *"Any other conditions?"* the British officer asked. The Gurkha leader said they also wanted the planes to fly slow, and no higher than 100 feet. In response, the British officer said that the airplanes always flew as slow as possible, but had to be higher than 100 feet or the parachutes wouldn't open. *"Parachutes?"* the Gurkha leader said. *"You didn't say we'd have parachutes! In that case, we'll jump without any conditions."* Now THAT is dedication! The Gurkhas were willing to jump out of airplanes without parachutes to serve a country to which they didn't even fully belong.

As we worship God on Veterans Day, we are reminded of the concept of dedication. As we think about the level of dedication it takes to serve in the military, we also need to remember however the level of dedication Christians are called to have in living by the ways of God. For while it is the mission of the military to battle persons who would seek to do physical harm to others, it is the mission of Christians to battle against what Paul described in Ephesians 6 as the *"spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms,"* for they seek to do spiritual harm to people. To accomplish its goals in fighting a physical enemy, the military uses physical weapons. But since the Church is battling against *"the rulers . . . the authorities . . . [and] the powers of this dark world,"* we are called to participate in that spiritual struggle with spiritual weapons. And the spiritual weapons we are to use in that spiritual battle are the talents God has given us.

We see this in the passage from Matthew. In that passage, Jesus told a parable about a man who was preparing to go on a trip. Part of that preparation was to give five units of money to a servant to use to produce additional wealth for him. To another, he gave two units. And to a third, he gave one. When he returned, he called his servants to account for how they had handled their allotment. As the accounting unfolds we find out that the first servant doubled that which had been entrusted to him. The second servant did the same. Each was commended. They had been dedicated to using what was entrusted to them in faithful ways.

But the third servant buried his money. When the master returned, he dug it up and returned it, with no increase in what was entrusted to his care. The master became angry. He took the talent away from the last servant, gave it to the first, and ordered that the chastised servant be thrown *"outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

To see what this passage has to do with dedication, not only in the lives of those serving in the armed services of our country but also - and especially - in the lives of the disciples of Jesus, we need to realize that while Jesus constructed this parable in economic terms, He was talking about much more than money. He was talking about the ways God entrusts the value of His kingdom to us (allotted in the talents He gives out) to use toward godly ends. In addition, while we may not all have been given the same number of talents (after all, Jesus said in this parable that some people are MORE gifted than others) each of us has been given at least one “talent” to use in the spiritual battle against *“the rulers . . . authorities . . . [and] powers of this dark world.”*

This is why Jesus ended the parable the way He did. He wanted to remind those who follow Him that failure to use the talents He has bestowed on us will not only effect the here and now of this world (in terms of other persons not coming to know God) but also our own future in the world to come (where WE might end up being judged for the sins of wickedness and laziness).

We see this spoken about in the passage from Revelation. In chapter 20, we are told that we will only get into heaven if our name is *“written in the book of life.”* Elsewhere in the Bible, we are told that our names are written in the Book of Life because *“God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.”*

At first, these two ideas may seem contradictory, and we can wonder if the Bible says we are saved *“by grace through faith,”* or through good works. Grace and works are not in conflict, however. The things we do (our works) are merely evidence of the state of our heart (and if we have allowed God’s grace to turn our heart to God). Our actions therefore express what we believe, what is important to us, and who it is we ultimately serve: ourselves or God.

The judgement that Revelation is talking about is therefore the final revealing of the state of our heart. If our ultimate loyalty is to God, and not ourselves or some other earthly entity, our works will show that we are a follower of the Lamb, and our name is written in the Book of Life. John says, however, that the opposite is also true. If our ultimate loyalty has been to ourselves or some other earthly entity and not God, our works will show that we are not a follower of the Lamb and our name is not written in the Book of Life.

This is why Jesus said elsewhere in the gospels *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father. [For] Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, Depart from Me, ‘I never knew you.’”*

The reason such judging will happen is that we have been created by God for a purpose. That purpose is to not only receive God’s love into our own lives, and to allow God to save us through that love, but also to share that love so others can be saved. For the desire that others should also be saved is evidence that we have made it to the point of being the saints God intended us to be when He first created us. What this means for Christians in practical terms can be seen in how life is lived in the military. In the military the dedicated work of a service member means . . . MORE WORK.

To see this, think about what happens to a new recruit after boot camp.

They are not rewarded with a furlough. They are assigned to a service unit. There, they are expected to do MORE WORK. If they are successful in that work, they are still not rewarded with time off, but . . . MORE WORK. *“Well done, good and trustworthy soldier. Enter into the joy of your commander. You have been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your commander’s happiness!”*

When it comes to certain aspects of civilian life, we also understand this concept. People work hard to be recognized by their employer. Their goal is to be promoted. The promotion does not result in time off, but . . . more WORK. *“Well done, good and trustworthy employee. Enter into the joy of your employer. You have been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your employer’s happiness!”* This also occurs in sports. A football player works hard all week in practice so he can work even harder on game day. *“Well done, good and trustworthy player!”* the coach says. He then rewards the player with a starting position in the game. How crazy it would seem if the coach said *“you’ve worked hard at practice all week. Here’s a ticket to the game. Go sit in the stands.”*

When it comes to the Church, Jesus says the reward for dedicated work in the battle against *“the rulers . . . authorities . . . [and] powers of this dark world”* is also . . . MORE WORK! *“You have been trustworthy in a few things,”* Jesus says, *“I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”* For some people, this isn’t good news however. Because of our sinful nature, we can be tempted to want to hear Jesus say *“well done, good and faithful servant, enter into your REST.”* That is not what God says in the Bible, however.

In the pages of the Bible, God tells us that when we do a good job in the battle against evil, and when we live as a faithful follower of Jesus, our reward is not rest, but more work in the battle against evil. This means that if we work hard to develop and use our talents, we will not win REST, but more opportunities for SERVICE. In fact, if you look through the pages of the Bible, you will find that the only time a Christian enters into “rest” is when they die! We see this in Revelation 13. There John says that He heard *“a voice from heaven saying ‘blessed are the dead who die in the Lord! Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors.”* This is why that verse is one of the readings in the funeral liturgy.

It is therefore appropriate to honor those who risk their lives in military service so there might be peace, justice, and freedom in world. That is why we have done today during this service. It is appropriate to honor those who sacrificially give of themselves in spiritual battle against *“the rulers . . . the authorities . . . [and] the powers of this dark world.”* That is why we did that last week on All Saints Day. It is even more appropriate, however, for us to dedicate ourselves to being part of the spiritual battle against evil. For that is why Jesus not only died on the cross, but also calls us to “fight the good fight” as His disciples. For we are called not only to receive God’s love, and be saved ourselves, but also to use God’s love to combat the darkness of evil by inviting other people to join us in the light of God’s love. As a result, doing anything less than that is choosing to go

AWOL from the Great Commission which God has given us!

To illustrate the dedication God calls us to have to Him and His kingdom, you were given a gold coin when you came into worship. It is, of course, not a real coin, but a chocolate coin. It was given to you as a reminder of the parable we heard today about a man who gave his servants a certain number of talents to use. Your talent may have been small, large, or somewhere in the middle. As you think back to receiving that talent, I want you to recall your first thought. Was it a thought about yourself, and if you would eat the chocolate right away, or save it for later? Or was your first thought about who you could give that chocolate coin to as an act of love?

Now think about the real talents God has given you. As you rise up each day, do your thoughts center around how to use your talents to further the kingdom of God, and take your place in the spiritual battle against “*the rulers . . . authorities . . . [and] powers of this dark world?*” Or do your first thoughts revolve around just making yourself happy? How about as you go through the day? Are your thoughts centered around acts of dedicated service to the King of Kings, or acts of self indulgence.

Veterans Day is therefore a good day to not only remember those who have dedicated their lives to the physical protection of others, but also to vow to live each and every moment of each and every day as soldiers of God, seeking to “fight the good fight” against “*the rulers . . . authorities . . . [and] powers of this dark world?*” by responding to God’s love, and then sharing God’s love with everyone we meet.