

*Text of a message delivered by Aidan Wivell at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 2nd August 2026.
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Owed Nothing, Given Everything

Luke 17:7-19

Welcome back to our Luke series and to our journey with Jesus to Jerusalem. After today we only have three sermons left in this part of our Luke series. In just a couple of chapters Jesus will make his entry to Jerusalem for Holy Week which we'll pick up early next year. In this stage of the journey, we've been unpacking various teachings and parables of Jesus, last week I know many of us were impacted by Grant's message on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus – who knew he was the only person named in a parable! - that's one of the joys of going through a full gospel is we get to interact with parts of scripture that might be less familiar to us!

But I want to start today with a saying, not from Jesus, but from a sports coach. In fact, this is an American Rugby coach, yes I mean rugby union in the USA, and while you kiwis might not need any American wisdom on how to play the game of rugby... his saying is worth hearing. It goes like this: *"Entitled to nothing, grateful for everything."*

The motto is attributed to coach Jack Clark and has become a powerful life and sports mantra meaning success and good things must be earned through hard work, and nothing in life is owed to you. This quote captures the heart of what we're going to talk about today from Luke chapter 17 so I've shortened it for our title: Owed Nothing, Given Everything.

The start of chapter 17 contains some striking instructions on sin, repentance, forgiveness, and faith in the context of community. Really, he's talking about how to do life and faith together.

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We could have spent our whole sermon there but today we're going to focus on the two sections that follow. The first is a short and uncomfortable parable Jesus tells his disciples starting at verse 7.

“Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? Won’t he rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’” (Luke 17:7-10)

Unworthy Servants

Last week when Grant preached on the parable of Lazarus and the rich man a number of people commented that they'd never heard it before. Fair enough, it's a big Bible, there are lots of stories, and some get more coverage than others. But I reckon even less of us will have been familiar with this week's parable, known as the parable of the unworthy servant. Some of you may have even pulled out your Bible to check this is actually there! On the surface it doesn't sound very Jesus-like... But it's there. Jesus said it. He meant it. So, let's unpack it together.

Jesus first asks the disciples to imagine themselves as the master in the scenario. When your servant comes home from their work in the field, he asks, will you be waiting with the red carpet rolled out and dinner ready for them?

Of course not, the disciples think. Great story, kind of obvious, let's get on to Jerusalem.

But Jesus isn't finished. Cleverly, as he lands the parable, he flips the script.

You're not the master in this story.

You're the servant.

“So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’” (v10)

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First of all, as we start to unpack this challenging teaching, I want to highlight the word **duty**. Does the servant expect special thanks when he does what he was asked to do? No, they've got a job to do and they get on and do it. It's their duty.

Duty. It's not the most attractive call to action. It sounds unglamorous, uninspiring, and well it's not very sexy! But I want to make the case that duty is both **compelling** and **fitting** for Christian life. My favourite quote on duty comes from catholic writer Ronald Rolheiser. I've shared it before but it's so good it's worth sharing again. Writing about the transformative power of everyday life and faithfulness he writes:

Stay inside your commitments, be faithful, your place of work is a seminary, your work is a sacrament, your family is a monastery, your home is a sanctuary. Stay inside them, don't betray them, learn what they are teaching you without constantly looking for life elsewhere and without constantly believing that God is elsewhere.

- Rolheiser, *Domestic Monastery*

The unglamorous and repetitive work of showing up to school in the cold winter mornings, doing uni assignments, raising young children, commuting to work, caring for aging parents, doing the food shopping, walking the dog, washing the dishes past your bedtime after having people over for dinner - these are the dutiful spaces where we can encounter God!

Duty may be unglamorous but deep down we all know it's value.

When I was in England recently, I went to Catholic Mass with some family. It was the end of the school year and, as part of the mass, the local Catholic school was honouring a teacher who had worked at the school for over 20 years. As this teacher shared about the privilege it had been to work with every kid, to play a small part in their journey, and to see her own children and now grandchildren attend the school – she summed up by saying she couldn't have imagined a better place to spend her life.

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My cousin and I laughed afterwards that we had gotten way too emotionally invested! This woman was a complete stranger to us, but we were almost in tears and running up to hug her after the service! We felt a deep admiration for her years of dutiful service. Duty is compelling. And it is also fitting.

The Greek word translated as duty literally means **to be indebted** or **to owe something**.

In Jesus' parable the servant's hard work, as admirable as it may be, does not put the master in his debt. In the same way nothing we do for God puts him in our debt. Everything is gift from Him anyway. Our stuff, our talents, our relationships, our very lives. Our worship is to offer those things back to Him without condition.

Often, however, we bargain with God. I'll trade you a couple of hours here, for resolution in this area. I'll give this thing up, if you bless this new endeavour. I know I can be tempted to think like this about coming into ministry, "like God I gave up a promising career to follow Your call – now do your bit..."

But the truth is **God owes us nothing**.

In the words of a song we'll sing at the end ***"Jesus you don't owe me anything"***.

Now all this might still sound harsh and un-Jesus like... especially those words "unworthy servants", so before we move on, I want to make it clear that Jesus is not saying we are worthless! Nor is he saying our worth is only based on what we can do for Him.

He is saying nothing we do can put Him in our debt.

Nothing we can do will make us the master and Him our servant.

And remember that this is coming from the same gospel as the parable of the prodigal son. Who returns home to his father planning to become his servant with the words "I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father is having none of it and throws a raging party to

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celebrate his son coming home. So yes, we are servants of God, even unworthy servants, but because of God's grace we are also celebrated as sons and daughters.

Owed nothing – given everything.

This brings us back to our quote from the beginning: “Entitled to nothing, grateful for everything.” Written for a sporting context but a great posture for Christian life. And, the subject of the second half of that quote, gratitude, is now where we'll focus as we look at the final section. I'm sure you're familiar with the Good Samaritan, we're now going to meet the grateful Samaritan.

The Grateful Samaritan

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” (Luke 17:11-19)

This is a story of gratitude and intimacy. Of a surface healing, and a deeper healing. We can track the major movements of the story through distance. Initially when Jesus meets the group of lepers we are told they “**stood at a distance**” (v12). This was a requirement at the time because of their skin condition. Literally the original social distancing. There are many things that can still keep people, that can keep us, at a distance from God.

But despite the distance the people cry out for help and Jesus tells them to go show themselves to the priests, the official way for them to be proclaimed healed. So off they go, healed of their leprosy on their way, but physically further from Jesus.

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The first two movements involve all ten of the group but only one makes the final journey. One of them returns to Jesus and now is closer than ever, coming right up to Jesus, and even falling at His feet in gratitude and praise. Not only is he healed on the surface but now Jesus says to him **“rise and go. Your faith has made you well.” (v19)**

A deeper healing has taken place for this man because he sought deeper intimacy. He was not content to just accept the gift, he went back in gratitude to the giver. All ten experienced healing, but only one entered relationship. Jesus praises him for it, but he also makes it clear that the other nine missed the invitation. The question for you and me is ***are we more like the other nine or the Grateful Samaritan?***

When push comes to shove, are we more after the gift or the Giver?

The healing or the Healer?

The saving or the Saviour?

When I got birthday cards as a little kid I opened them expectantly to see if money would drop out? I was way more interested in the gift than the giver! My parents had to remind me to read the words, whose it from, remember to say thank you.

On one level my parents were trying to teach me good manners. Be grateful, say thank you. But on a deeper level they were teaching me that gratitude is the pathway to relationship. That's what the grateful Samaritan teaches us. All ten lepers experienced healing, but through gratitude, one entered relationship.

As we close we're going to sing the song “Nothing Else”. The words of this song remind me that when it comes to Jesus, He owes me nothing but has given me everything. Like the prodigal son, I am undeserving of being called his servant but he welcomes me home, not just as a servant, but as a beloved son and even a friend. In response what can I offer him but my attention. My service. My affection. My allegiance. My obedience. Which are ways of saying, my whole life.

Let's pray.

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Reflecting on Sunday 26th July 2026: Last week Grant encouraged us to open our eyes to the “Lazaruses at our gate”. Who have you noticed this week in a new way? Or perhaps, what has gotten in the way?

These questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

1. What's someone else's quiet, faithful "duty" that you've come to appreciate more as you've gotten older?
2. Have you ever caught yourself "bargaining" with God—thinking, "I've done this for you, so I hope you'll do this for me"? What do you think sits behind that mindset?
3. Ten lepers received the gift, but only one returned to the Giver. In your own faith, what helps you move beyond simply receiving God's blessings to enjoying relationship with God himself?
4. As you reflect on your life right now, what would it look like to respond to Jesus with the gratitude of the Samaritan this week? Is there one practical step that God might be inviting you into?

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we're better together** and **no perfect people are allowed**.

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. This section of Luke's gospel calls us to both gratitude and humility because we are owed nothing, given everything. Check out this short article by Richard Rohr on **Practicing Gratitude**.
<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/gratitude-and-humility/>
2. The sermon quoted from a book called **Domestic Monastery**. But what has parenting got to do with monks? Check out this **video podcast** if you're interested in fun and helpful conversation about why it's such a helpful metaphor.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dn7MVsjDOo>
3. **The Bible Society** has created this **reading plan for the Gospel of Luke** which takes you through one chapter a day with short reflections. Want to reconnect with the big picture of Luke's account? This would be a great way to do so over 35 days.
<https://biblesociety.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Living-the-Gospel-of-Luke.pdf>