

The Importance of Unremarkable Service¹

(Derek Tidball)

The brief instructions about maintaining the lights and caring for the bread include the word continually four times (2, 3, 4, 8).² This gives us both the clue to why they are included at this point and the key principle they seek to inculcate. Chapter 23 had outlined the major events of the year. By contrast, these verses deal with the routine events of every day and every week. The lamps are to be tended daily and the bread on the table replaced weekly. It was by any measure unspectacular, mundane and routine service for God, but, for all that, it was no less important than presiding over the big celebrations or offering a multitude of sacrifices.

The danger of much of today's Christianity, with its concentration on major gatherings and celebrity speakers, is that it sets wrong aspirations before emerging Christian leaders. Some see the glamour and glitz and want to have a prominent place in the celebration event or on the big platform before they are ready. They do not see, and they fail to grasp, the significance of serving God faithfully in the unremarkable, small and routine work that characterizes most service for God.

In the school of Jesus, disciples were trained to grasp the need to serve God in the ordinary, small things that others dismissed as unworthy of their time. His attitude to children, his stress on watching over 'the little ones', by which he meant weak disciples, and the significance he saw in a simple 'cup of cold water', gave us one insight into what he considers important. So, too, do his comments following the parable of the shrewd manager.³ While the parable itself may be difficult for us, because on the surface Jesus seems to be commending dishonesty, the lessons he draws from it are crystal clear. In God's service, servants have to prove themselves faithful in the little things before being entrusted with the bigger things, faithful with material responsibilities before being entrusted with spiritual ones, and faithful in handling other people's property before being entrusted with their own.⁴

The priests of old would have understood that in 'the trivial round, the common task' there was 'a road to bring us daily nearer God'. The tending of the lamp and the replenishing of the bread were simple routine tasks, the one a daily chore and the other a weekly offering, that enabled God's light to shine in a dark world and God's food to be available for a hungry people.



¹ Derek Tidball, *The Message of Leviticus*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005), pp. 284-286.

² From Leviticus 24.

³Luke 16:1-9.

⁴ Luke 16:10-12.

The truth is that many of us get worn down by the endless round of tedious tasks and do not find ourselves being brought near to God through them. When this happens we need to look to Jesus. A prayer by Ruth Etchells puts it brilliantly. Having complained about discouragement and 'the weariness of grinding routine', she continues:

And then I turn my eyes to you, Lord Christ:

You gave up the infinite space of eternity,
The shining serenity of heaven;
Surrendered your power, honour and rightful glory
To the crushing finitude of our human life.

Oh my Lord Christ, for what? for whom?
Yes, Lord, I hear you. For us. For me.

You gave up the lovely companionships of eternity,
The totally trusting, totally trustworthy loves of heaven;
Were subject to pettiness, scorn, misunderstanding,
And the limited love your friends could give you
And humiliation and death your enemies planned for you.

Yes, Lord, I hear you. For us. For me.

Oh my Lord, forgive me. For you took to yourself the tedium and frustration of this ordinary human life of mine, and so lived it that it gave glimpses of the glory and the richness of the life within it of heaven, for which we were created and for which I long. You showed how the life of heaven was present to be lived here and now; you opened up for us the way to do it.

Oh Lord, help me to grasp hold of that truth today, so that the ordinary things I do and my every encounter, reflect, however dimly, the lambency⁵ of heaven. To which heaven bring me in fullness, my dear Lord Christ, one day.

Amen.⁶



⁵ "Lambency" means "light" or "brilliance."

⁶ Ruth Etchells, *Just as I Am: Personal Prayers for Every Day* (London: SPCK, 1994), pp. 58-59.