

“Abundant Faith, Generous Hearts - Giving for the Sake of Others”

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

Graphics: heart, harvest, works of mercy

Big Truth: When we have abundant faith in Jesus, because we are convinced of his sacrifice and salvation through the cross, our lives become a sacrifice for Him. Abundant faith leads us to generous hearts - to give our time, talents, gifts, and service. This response requires investment into the life of the faith community, giving more than we get (or so we think), investing in others, and committing to generously give as a response to our abundant faith.

Focus Phrase: I give for the sake of others and with a view of eternity.

1. Introduction

- A. Nikos Kazantzakis tells the story of a monk whose greatest desire was to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem’s Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Over the course of many years he was able to save and beg the sum of 30 pounds: just enough to take him to his destination. The monk stepped through the gates of the monastery to begin his journey, but no sooner had he done so than he met a beggar, bent low to the ground, picking herbs. The beggar asked him where he was going. “To the Holy Sepulchre,” he replied. By God's grace I shall walk around it three times, kneel and pray, and return home a new and better person.” The beggar looked at him with longing in his eyes. He said, “Give me the 30 pounds for my hungry family, walk around me three times, kneel and pray, and return to your monastery.” The monk paused, scratched the ground with his staff, looked into his heart, and gave the beggar the 30 pounds. He walked around him three times, knelt and prayed. He returned to the monastery a new and better person, for he had seen in the beggar Christ himself, right there at the monastery. -Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Greek Passion* (Simon & Schuster, 1954).
- B. This morning’s message is straightforward. **We give for the sake of others.**
- C. Having said that, we’ve spent the past two weeks talking about giving...giving our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our service to the ministry of the church and the work of the kingdom.
- D. Because of our abundant faith and generous hearts, we’ve **inventoried our Kingdom investment potential** - what we have that God wants to use - and made the decision to **go all in**. Next, we’ve **checked our expectations of the immediate payoff** we get from investing in the church, knowing that it’s in receiving God’s **grace** through faith that then invites us to give generously.
- E. In our scripture this morning, we’re going to the very last story or parable of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew, prior to the beginning of Jesus’ death and resurrection narrative.

- F. And it's the final teaching from Jesus in the gospel about Judgment Day...that what we do NOW has a profound impact on the conversation we have with Jesus when He returns to judge the world.
- G. So, if you're taking notes, write this down: **I give for the sake of others and with a view of eternity.** Let's pray...
- H. **PRAY!**
- I. Turn with me to Matthew 25, starting in verse 31...

2. Scripture

A. **READ Matthew 25:31-46**

- B. Jesus began this story with a very clear statement that what He was about to say was explicitly about the day when He returns, as He promised, to judge every person for their actions and their sin. Church, there IS a day coming when Jesus will return and you and I will stand before Jesus and be judged for our actions in this life.
- C. Jesus talked about that Day throughout the gospels. By the time we get to Matthew 25, the disciples are very aware of it. But because this is the final teaching of Jesus to the disciples, he's being plain and clear. A day is coming when the Son of Man will come again, and ALL nations (all people) will be gathered before Him, AND he will separate one from another...
- D. And this process of separation will be LIKE (and here's where this begins to look more like a parable) when a **shepherd separates sheep from goats.**
- E. Now, I'll admit right now that I am not a farmer. So, when I read that, I have no idea what that means or why a shepherd would do that. So, I did some research and I found this cool VIDEO.
- F. **VIDEO** - separating sheep and goats (2:00 min)
- G. I love the one goat that was sitting in the water basin. That made my day when I watched this the first time! Did you catch that? There's always ONE!
- H. You can now see how this illustration would make sense to those listening in the first century, right?
- I. So, with that in mind, we turn to the message of the parable: **that Jesus commands us NOW to care for those who have needs, as evidence of our faith and a response to our love for Jesus and his sacrifice.**
- J. He specifically listed out the hungry. The thirsty. Strangers. The naked. Those who are sick. And those who are in prison. Caring for those needs means feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting the prisoner.

- K. Again, this is very straight-forward stuff...and I'm thankful that Jesus lays it out for us. There's no 'digging deep' into the meaning of this because it's right there on the table, ready to be picked up.
- L. Jesus did the things that he listed out. And so, as followers of Jesus, those who do the things that Jesus listed (and others like them) are deemed righteous and will be blessed and will be welcomed into everlasting life on the Day of Judgment.
- M. But those who do NOT do those things will go away into eternal punishment on that Day.
- N. Said another way: those who heed the commandment of Jesus to love God and love their neighbor will please God. Those who do not heed Jesus' commandment to love will not please God.
- O. One of the fascinating things about the two different groups in this parable is that they have something in common. Both groups didn't KNOW that they were doing, or not doing, the acts of mercy that Jesus listed. The first group asked, "...when did we feed the hungry and cloth the naked, etc.?" And Jesus said, **"When you did that to the LEAST of the members of the family, you did that to me."**
- P. So, it's AS IF they were feeding Jesus himself, and caring for Jesus and visiting Jesus in prison. And, I would assert that if Jesus was in our midst physically this morning, right here in worship, and was hungry, we'd all want to jump up and go out into the Gallery and grab him a cookie and some coffee! Would we do that for ANYONE else who was hungry, or thirsty? Jesus commands us to do it.
- Q. The flip side of that is really sad. Those who didn't do those things for the least ones - those in need - it was as if they didn't help sick and hungry Jesus, even though they saw Jesus in that state.

3. Application

- A. I don't think it's an overstatement, based on this parable, that we give our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our service so that the ministries of the church can stay on mission and vision, we are giving to Jesus. Giving to the church isn't just about keeping the lights and heat on. The motivation for giving is not about what you and I get as a payoff. The motivation is to keep the mission and vision advancing so that others can be made whole in every way!
- B. When you have abundant faith that Jesus is who he says he is and did what the Bible says he did, and you give with a generous heart to anyone or any place of need, you are giving to Jesus himself. As a response to what Jesus has done in YOUR life, giving for the sake of others is translated into giving to Jesus himself. That's AWESOME!!

- C. We know that Jesus cares for those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, and in prison...those who were lepers, sinners, broken, outcast, in bondage to sin, and who were lost. His life proved that he gravitated to anyone in need, anywhere. And WE are called to do the same thing...as if anyone who is in need was Jesus himself.
- D. And THAT is why you give...to faithfully meet needs and to tangibly live out your faith in Him. Your responsibility to Jesus is to care for those He puts in your path...in your life...and in your church. Without an expectation of return or payment...and if you don't know you're doing it, maybe that's right where Jesus wants you to be.
- E. You may be thinking, "OK. I get it in theory - I need to give to help others in need. But where do I begin?" Here are some application points to write down:
- F. First, **Give what you give with a view of eternity.**
- i. William J. Bausch wrote, "Christianity is, above all, a way of seeing. Everything else in the Christian life flows from and circles around the transformation of vision. Christians see differently, and that is why their prayer, their worship, their action, their whole way of being in the world, has a distinctive accent and flavor." - William J. Bausch, *The Yellow Brick Road: A Storyteller's Approach to the Spiritual Journey* (Twenty-Third Publications, 1999), 19.
 - ii. It's about your vision...what and who you see. The ones in the parable that didn't give to those in need didn't see them. Those who did give to meet needs, saw the people in need, but didn't see that it was Jesus they were serving. That's humility.
 - iii. Jesus calls you to pray, show up, give, and serve with an eye on the eternal value of what you're doing. So often, we think we're JUST giving or JUST serving, or JUST praying, and that's where it ends. What we forget is that when we do those things IN JESUS' NAME, we're invoking the infinite POWER of the God who created the Universe.
 - iv. And when you take the time to invoke the presence of Jesus as you give to ministry in any way, it takes on eternal value, not just worldly significance.
 - v. When you give, don't look past the immediate needs in front of you, but also keep eternity in view as you meet those immediate needs.
 - vi. To get even more practical...here's how:
- G. Start with **engaging in the Wesleyan Works of Mercy to all people**
- i. John Wesley expected the people that came to the Methodist Bands and Classes in the late 18th century to engage in works of mercy, which he put in two categories: **acts of compassion and acts of justice.**
 - a. Acts of compassion are things like Jesus listed - giving food to the hungry and caring for those who are sick, clothing the naked.

- b. Acts of justice are advocating for the poor and imprisoned...in order to affect change in the world for Jesus. Justice is enacting God's mercy to others who are in need and can't advocate for themselves.
 - ii. You are called to SEE people and their needs and **show mercy** - every time you see it.
 - iii. Steve Mansker wrote this: "Works of mercy' are practices Jesus gave Christians to do as they follow his teachings. They are both personal and social. Acts of compassion are personal works of mercy. They are what you do with a person who needs help. When you meet someone who is hungry, give her something to eat. When someone's loved one dies, you go and comfort him. When someone is a stranger in the congregation or your home you extend hospitality. These are examples of acts of compassion Jesus practiced and taught his disciples to imitate. They are simple kindness that shares God's love through you."
 - iv. Give by engaging in works of mercy whenever you find needs, wherever you find yourself.
- H. And, **keep seeking out new opportunities to give for the sake of others**
- i. There may be a limited number of people in the church to serve by giving to our ministries, but there are unlimited number of people in your life.
 - ii. John Wesley said of this parable, "What encouragement is here to assist the household of faith [!] But let us likewise remember to do good to all..." - John Wesley Notes 25:40.
 - iii. Don't let the ministries you do be the only ones you ever do. Don't let the ways you give be the only ways you ever give. Needs change. The church changes. The mission field shifts. People come and go and their needs may be new. You change!
 - iv. Keep asking God to reveal the needs of today AND of tomorrow. Try new things in new ways to engage in works of mercy, with a view of eternity.
 - v. Jesus knows exactly what the needs are in the life of every person in our church and community. You and I are only limited by our willingness to dream with Jesus about what those are and how to meet those needs.
 - vi. Pray. Dream. And then get out there...take some risks...and give.
- I. As you grow in those three areas, you will be confident to proclaim, "I give for the sake of others and with a view of eternity."

4. Conclusion

- A. The monk in our opening story thought he knew what HIS needs were. He wanted his life to be changed. Yet, when he gave for the sake of someone else, he received more than he imagined. Not only was HIS life changed, but he also changed the life of the other, in Jesus' name.

- B. As you ask God about giving your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service, be ready to not only be changed, but to change the lives of others.
- C. Next week, we'll spend time making a commitment to give. Not a card that you'll hand in, but some time to reflect and respond to the moving of the Spirit as it relates to giving, as we celebrate God's abundance.
- D. Keep searching your inventory and your expectations this week. What new ways does God want to use our church to seek out the least, the last, the lost, and the lonely? To give for the sake of others in need?
- E. Let's pray and then we'll sing about God's eternal view! We're ready!
- F. **PRAY!**