

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

How Will You Measure Your Life?

Sunday, October 7, 2018

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Luke 9: 24-25

How will you measure your life? The world tells us we should measure our lives by how much money we have, what cars we own, the achievements we have made, and the power and status we have attained. But, in the end, is this really how we want to measure our lives? Is this how we want to be remembered?

Clay Christiansen wrote a great book entitled *How Will You Measure Your Life?* Christensen is a Harvard Business professor who, surprisingly, tells his students that their lives should not be measured by their success in business.

You see, Christiansen also graduated from Harvard and he explains his experience attending class reunions. He said at his fifth year reunion his fellow classmates seemed to be doing really well. They had high paying jobs and great marriages and families. They were polished and prosperous. Their lives seemed to be going well on every level.

But by the tenth reunion he experienced something he never expected. Several of his successful classmates didn't come back for the reunion. As he asked other classmates where they were, he discovered that although many of his classmates achieved life changing success and were making enormous amounts of money they were not happy and did not enjoy their lives. Many of them had unhappy marriages and some were already divorced. One classmate had not spoken to his children for years.

Christiansen observed that although many of his classmates were professionally successful they were personally miserable and their lives were a mess.

Things just got worse. He said at his twenty-fifth and thirtieth year reunions he found out that one of his classmates, Jeffrey Skilling, was sent to prison for his role in the Enron scandal. Christiansen knew him in school as a good, smart man who loved his family and had good values. But over time something went drastically wrong in his life. Something had sent him in the wrong direction.

But Skilling wasn't the only one. Many of his Rhodes Scholar classmates had also made a mess of their lives. One was arrested for insider trading. Another ended up in jail for having a sexual relationship with a

minor. Some of them were on their third and fourth marriages.

Christiansen tells his students this story every year as a cautionary tale. "Do not measure your life by success, money and achievement. Those things are great and they have their place but they will never bring real meaning and satisfaction to your lives."

Maybe some of you feel like I am talking directly to you today. You have gotten the awards, success, money, notoriety, power, recognition, praise and glory. And yet you are still empty inside. There is a hole in you that cannot be filled. All the things you have done and achieved are really not how you want to measure your life. And you are in worship today because you know something needs to change.

To help encourage you let me give you a quiz. I want you to try to answer these questions:

1. Name the five wealthiest people in the world.
2. Name the last five Heisman trophy winners.
3. Name the last five winners of the Miss America Contest.
4. Name ten people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer Prize.
5. Name the last half dozen Academy Award winners for best actor and actress.
6. Name the last decade's worth of World Series winners.

How did you do? None of us remember the headlines of yesterday. The applause dies. Awards tarnish. Achievements are forgotten. Accolades and certificates are buried with their owners.

Here's another quiz. See how you do on this one:

1. List a few teachers who aided your journey through

school...

2. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.
4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.
5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.

It's easier to answer those questions isn't it? What does that tell you? The people who make a difference in your life are NOT the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. They are the ones who care. They are the ones who are faithful, who serve, who show unusual kindness and love.

The Bible has taught us this all along. God will measure our lives not by how much we get but by how much we *give*. Jesus told us that **"it is better to give than to receive"** (Acts 20:35). He also said, **"Whoever loses their life, gives their life away for my sake will save it, will find life, but whoever holds on to their life for themselves, will lose life, will never find life. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?"** (Luke 9:24-25).

It's clear. Jesus tells us that God measures each of our lives by how much of it we are willing to give away for him - how well we love and how well we serve. Now why? Well, first because living a life of giving is the only way to find meaning and happiness in this world. If you are looking for fun, joy, meaning and satisfaction, give your life away in service to Christ. The happiest people I know are the most generous people I know. And the most miserable people I know are the stingiest people I know. God hardwired us to find giving fun and rewarding. We are made in his image.

But the other and even more important reason why God measure our lives by how much we are willing to give away is this: **When God wants something done in this world he counts on us to do it!** That's right. We are God's agents in the world. Take a look at this passage that spells it out:

God can pour on the blessings in astonishing ways so that you're ready for anything and everything, more than just ready to do what needs to be done. He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way,

producing with us great praise to God. -2nd Corinthians 9:8 and 11

Did you see that? God gives you (us) something we can give away, and as we give it away the more we get back so that we can continue to be generous!

You know what this means? We are to be the channel through which God's blessings and redemptive power flows to the world! As we receive blessings from God, we are to give those blessings away. When God wants something done he counts on us to do it!

I am reminded of the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12. The man had accumulated much wealth and "stuff" and built bigger barns to hoard it. Jesus called him a fool, not because he was rich but because he didn't know why he was rich. It never dawned on him that he was blessed to be a blessing to others.

You want to know something that will blow your mind? There is only one incident in the Bible where God meets the needs of others WITHOUT using his people - God providing manna to the Israelites in the desert. Note that the manna stopped once the people reached the Promised Land. Every other time God wanted to help others he did it through his people. We are the hands and feet of Jesus in the world! We are the body of Christ in this world! What do we think that means?

When the people of God do not give financially to the church something God wants done does not get done. It is as simple as that. We are the only bank account God has. There is no other way for God to meet the needs of people except through us.

When the people of God are not faithful to their vows to serve with their gifts, something God wants done does not get done. We are the only hands God has!

When the people of God are silent when injustices occur across this world, something God wants done does not get done. We are the only voice God has!

When we ask God, "Why aren't you doing anything about all of this suffering?" God's response is, "I am and I have. I have given my people all the resources they need to change and heal this world. I will never stop giving blessings so you can be a blessing, so why aren't you doing anything about it?"

Look at the story of Jesus feeding five thousand families in the wilderness in Mark 6. That was Jesus' great demonstration that God releases his resources through his people! A big crowd was hungry. Jesus told the disciples to feed them. The disciples said, "What? We can't do that? Do you know how much money that would cost?" Well, Jesus didn't accept their excuse of what they didn't have and he doesn't accept that excuse from us today. Jesus said, "How many loaves do you have?" Slaughter interprets Jesus' question to mean

“Don’t look at what you don’t have, look at what you do have!”

The disciples found five loaves and two fish. Jesus told the disciples to seat the people on the grass and tell them to get ready for a feast. The disciples thought Jesus had lost his mind. Jesus blessed the bread and fish and fed five thousand families with it.

You see, God blessed and multiplied what they had to give away. The disciples had enough faith in Jesus to give him what they had and he multiplied it! That’s what God always does – when we give Him what we have He multiplies it so that there is more than we could ever imagine. In the story, after everyone is fed, there is such an abundance that there is more left over!

You know what is also important in that story is that Jesus didn’t serve the crowd; he gave the disciples the food to serve the crowd. They were his hands then and we are his hands today. And if a church forgets this it begins to die. The effectiveness of a church rises and falls based on its willingness to be the hands and feet of Christ in this world.

One day God will say to us, “I gave you the gift of this church. What did you do with it? I gave you the gift of music. What did you do with it? I gave you the gift of teaching. What did you do with it? I gave you the gift of preaching. What did you do with it? I gave you the gift of wealth and resources. What did you do with it?”

Jim Wallis reminds us, “Faith is personal but never private!” The closer you get to Christ the more he draws you into the community and world for you to see the suffering that he sees and inspires you help him! Jesus is out in the world begging us to help him lift up the weak.

I recall hearing Archbishop Desmond Tutu speak at Candler many years ago. He said something in his sermon I will never forget: “So many Christians just go to the foot of the cross and thank Jesus for what he has done. But very few Christians get up on the cross with Jesus to see what Jesus sees and to feel what Jesus feels. It is only when they do that they will be motivated and empowered to help Jesus heal this broken world.”

Paul Tournier once said, “Every Christian needs two conversions – one out of the world, and one back into it.” I believe that. The Christian faith is not only about personal piety, reaching up to God and reaching in to ourselves. The Christian faith is only complete when our reaching up and reaching in leads us to reach out to others.

I love what Bob Goff has to say about serving Christ in his book “Love Does.” He said the way he learned how to really serve Christ and love others was by quitting Bible study. That’s right. He said he became a better Jesus follower when he quit Bible study. He said

Bible study just didn’t do it for him. It was like studying about God instead of bonding with God and doing something with him. He said he would just forget what he learned in Bible study because he never did anything with it!

So Goff said about 15 years ago he started to get together with a group of guys each week and instead of calling it a “Bible study” they called it a “Bible Doing.” At his Bible Doing they read what God has to say and then focus all their attention on what they are going to do about it. He says if you get engaged like that you will be able to remember Bible verses because you are living them instead of just reading them.

Amen to that! Don’t get me wrong. I’m all for Bible studies. They are critically important. But what’s the point if we are not doing something about what the Bible says?

"Bible doing instead of Bible studying." I like that! What if we called all of our Bible studies and Sunday school classes Bible doings instead of Bible studies? What if everyone one of our groups had a Bible doing component to it. What if every group was required to ask, “Based on what we have learned this week what are we going to do about it? How are we going to show unusual kindness to the beaten, broken and bruised? How are we going to build a fire for those who are cold and tired? How are we going to be a source of light, warm and strength in a dark and cold world?” In the end that is what matters.

This is what translates in our culture today. People have grown tired of religious trappings and talk. The world doesn’t need another sermon; it needs servants. The world doesn’t need another religious platitude; it needs caring people. The world doesn’t need more Christians screaming in judgment; it needs people who will give a cup of cold water in Jesus’ name. The world doesn’t need more guilt laid upon it; it needs more people who will embody the love of Jesus. The world needs less Bible studiers and more Bible doers!

The world needs people who will rise above hate, cynicism, and complacency, and penetrate this hurting world with loving service and sacrifice. That’s when people will start wondering who Christians are and, more importantly who Jesus is. That’s when people will start asking us about Jesus and desire a relationship with him. People don’t respond to words; they respond to action. And serving is putting God’s love into action.

Years ago a John Hopkin's professor gave a group of graduate students this assignment: Go to the slums. Take 200 boys, between the ages of 12 and 16, and investigate their background and environment. Then predict their chances for the future.

The students, after consulting social statistics, talking to the boys, and compiling much data, concluded

that 90 percent of the boys would spend some time in jail.

Twenty-five years later another group of graduate students was given the job of testing the prediction. They went back to the same area. Some of the boys - by then men - were still there, a few had died, some had moved away, but they got in touch with 180 of the original 200. They found that only four of the group had ever been sent to jail.

Why was it that these men, who had lived in a breeding place of crime, had such a surprisingly good record? The researchers were continually told: "Well, there was a teacher..."

They pressed further, and found that in 75 percent of the cases it was the same woman. The researchers went to this teacher, now living in a home for retired teachers. How had she exerted this remarkable influence over that group of children? Could she give them any reason why these boys should have remembered her?

"No," she said, "no I really couldn't." And then, thinking back over the years, she said musingly, more to herself than to her questioners: "I loved those boys...." (Bits and Pieces).

God will measure our lives by how well we loved and served. Are you using the resources God has given you to do his work in the world? We are called to be God's agents of love. Let's get after it.



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