

April 2, 2017

Don't Give Up!

*Don't Give Up Missions!*

Matthew 25:31-46

**Opening words:** Did you know 24% of all Americans observe the season of Lent? Lent comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lencten*, which means "spring." Excluding Sundays, because every Sunday is a little Easter, Lent is a forty-day period. Why forty days? Because, Jesus fasted forty days before being tempted by Satan. Lent began on Ash Wednesday and will end on Holy Saturday. Every year we are asked the same question: "What are you going to give up for Lent?" Maybe this is a better question: What are you not going to give up for Lent? Never forget, Lent is not a season of self-deprivation, it is a season of spiritual renewal.

This is the final message in my Lenten sermon series, *Don't Give Up!* We have been looking at five of the twelve spiritual disciplines. To date, we have looked at prayer, fasting, worship and reading the Bible. Today, we are going to look at service. Our Gospel reading for today is Matthew 25:31-46. Let me call this morning's message, *Don't Give Up Missions!*

**Matthew 25:31-46** <sup>31</sup>"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup>He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

<sup>34</sup>"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup>I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

<sup>37</sup>"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup>When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

<sup>40</sup>"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

<sup>41</sup>"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup>I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

<sup>44</sup>"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger

or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

<sup>45</sup>"He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

<sup>46</sup>"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

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Rick Warren once said, "*The only way to serve God is to serve other people.*" If you find some truth in that quote, say, "**Amen!**"

We find ourselves in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew. It is my favorite parable, so you may remember these opening words. There came a point in Jesus's earthly ministry when he was no longer welcomed in the synagogues. With no other option, Jesus began to teach in the open air and began to tell parables. Parables are nothing more than illustrations from daily living. They are not analogies, where each character represents a contemporary character. Parables are not that deep. They are only told to teach a single divine truth.

So, what is the truth Jesus is trying to teach in the parable of the sheep and the goats? This is the point: Jesus expects us to respond to human need. It is our way of expressing appreciation to God for saving our souls. We are not saved by our good works. That is impossible. We simply can't do enough. Our only hope is grace. We are saved by grace and by grace alone. That is why service or missions is so important to the life of the church. My goal today is to help you appreciate service or missions. I will do that by making three statements about missions. I hope these statements make you think. If you are ready to look at my three statements, say, "**Amen!**"

### **Missions involve interpersonal relationships.**

This is statement number one. Missions involve interpersonal relationships. Once you learn the name of a person you help, everything changes. Once you get involved in their story, missions come to life. Missions is not charity. Missions is deeper. There is nothing wrong with collecting food, paper products or hats. There are many people who need them. The problem is, you never get to know the person who will eat that food, use those paper products or wear the hat. Charity is fine, but the needy always remain at a distance. Missions involve interpersonal relationships. If you want to thank Jesus, get involved in someone else's story.

It was just about this time last year, Kolya and Stas were in my home. They are Russian orphans who came to America for prosthetic legs. Stas came to get his legs. Kolya came to get his legs repaired and adjusted. Stas was eight years old and stayed away from me. Kolya was sixteen and became my friend. He did what my daughters never did. He stayed up late with me and we watched the NCAA basketball tournament. He opened up during those late nights and we shared our lives. One night Kolya and I were talking. Wanting to give him a hard time about being Russian, I asked him a question just to get a reaction out of him. Knowing the Nazis nearly overran his town during the war, I said to him, "Kolya, what did you learn about World War II in those rotten Russian

schools?" Sixteen-year-olds are great in any country; they are just so unfiltered. Kolya rubbed the top of his head and gave me a smirk. He said, "We learned the American generals weren't very good and that was why the war lasted so long." We both laughed and I said, "I'll tell all my veteran friends we had rotten generals during World War II. I told a vet that story and he said, "The kid was right! We did have rotten generals". The best thing about that night was that I got to spend time with Kolya. Another day, Kolya and I were driving through Berlin Center. He asked me if all the houses had electricity. I said, "Yes!" He said, "Wow!" I can't wait to see him in a couple of weeks. He is a fine young man. Missions is not charity. In missions, we get involved with the needy. How involved are you with the truly needy? Missions is a great way to thank God for saving your soul. If that question makes you think, say, "**Amen!**"

### **Missions expose our spiritual maturity.**

This is statement number two. Missions or service expose our spiritual maturity. Spiritual babies think it is all about themselves. The more spiritually mature grow to understand that life is about others. No activity in the life of the church exposes spiritual maturity more than missions. Your response to missions says a great deal about your spiritual maturity. If it is true of people, then it is true of churches. If you show me a church that is not involved in missions then I will show you a church that is on the way to extinction.

On the day missions takes a backseat to everything else, Western Reserve will begin to die too! Listen to what I am about to say. If you want this church to close, then vote against or frustrate every mission opportunity. It is easy to do. You can justify your vote or your opinion based on sound business principles. You will get some support because the spiritually immature don't get it. Churches aren't businesses. The church was never meant to be a business. The church was meant to be an extension of Christ in the world. When the winds of Pentecost blew, the only thing that mattered to those charter members was Jesus. The only thing that should matter to us is Jesus. The spiritually mature understand when we care for the needy of this world, we are really caring for Jesus. When we ignore the needy of this world, we are ignoring Jesus. This is not my opinion. That is what the Master said in the parable. If you want to thank God for your salvation, then get involved in missions. Missions or service expose our spiritual maturity. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" If that statement makes you think, say, "**Amen!**"

### **Missions involve risk.**

This is statement number three. Missions does involve a certain amount of risk. Can I state the obvious? There are many frightened people in the church. Whenever I have gotten involved in a mission project, well-meaning people try to stop me. When I went to the Philippines, people told me, don't go! Their government was unstable. When I went to Mexico people told me, don't go! I would be taken hostage. When I went to Haiti people told me, don't go! I could get a disease. When I got involved in Mill Creek Workcamp people said to me, "Aren't you afraid to be in the city of Youngstown?"

Someone seems to be killed every day." Two days after Easter Kathryn and I are going to Russia. Guess what well-meaning people are telling me? Don't go - I won't be able to get back in the country. Yes, the plane may go down. Yes, the food may be bad. Yes, the residents may not like Americans. Yes, you may fall in love with one of the orphans and get your heart broken. This is what I have learned: The reward is far greater than the risk. There is a world of needy people out there whom God loves. How can you turn your back on them? If God has not told you to go, then don't go. Stay home and play it safe. But, if God has called someone to do something, then don't discourage them. Pray for them. Missions involve risk. If that question makes you think, say, "**Amen!**" Missions are the best way to thank God for your salvation.

Ernest Henry Shackleton was born in Ireland on February 15, 1874. His father wanted him to be a doctor, but he wanted to be a sailor. At the age of sixteen, he joined the merchant marines and saw the world. His greatest desire was to travel to the North and South Poles. In December of 1914, he got that opportunity. He was the captain of a ship called *Endurance*, which had a crew of twenty-seven men. Most of those men were recruited from a simple newspaper advertisement. It read:

*Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages. Bitter cold. Long months of complete darkness. Constant danger. Safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success.*

History tells us Shackleton could not take all the men that responded to that ad. Why would so many respond to such an ad? I believe the reason is people long for an adventure. No one just wants to live and die. We long for an adventure and an opportunity to make a difference.

I believe you long for an adventure and you want to make a difference in this world too. I believe, you are desperate to find a way to thank God for saving your soul. Rick Warren wasn't wrong. He once said, "*The Only way to serve God is to serve other people.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"