Volunteers Serving Others

Fourth in the series: Doing Our Part to Change the World

# Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

# Key thought: Disciples of Jesus bring transformation through service to others.

# Intro:

## Review

Today we are in the middle of a message series called, “Doing Our Part To Change The World.” We began the series a few weeks ago by emphasizing that if we are going to really make a difference in our world, we need to catch the big vision Jesus had for the transformation of society through his church. Jesus intended and expected that his church would make a big difference in a suffering and broken world. Once we see that, we become eager to get on board and be a part of that mission. The next week we talked about the fact that if we attempt this kind of mission on our own, it will be fruitless. Instead, the first activity in which we must engage is intercession for the needs of our world. God has ordained to work through the prayers of his people. Making a difference begins with prayer. Last week we followed up on that by emphasizing Jesus’ teaching that making a difference will also cost us something as it did him. It will require generosity and even sacrifice on our part if we are to truly make a difference in our world.

Today I would like us to continue to discuss how it is that we can make a difference in our world. One of the huge ways that Christians make a difference is through volunteer service to others, following the example of Jesus.

# A disturbing tendency of religion

Now this is where we run into a problem. We discover that there is a very disturbing tendency about religious practice.

## Isaiah

It is a tendency that Isaiah decried in the passage that we read. Isaiah told the people they were doing some of the right things. They appeared to be seeking God to know his ways presumably by attending instruction at the Temple (Isa, 58:2) They were fasting, praying, and going through religious acts of repentance (Isa, 58:3,5). But God’s message to them through the prophet Isaiah was that all of these things had simply become a religious performance. This was evidenced by the contradiction between their actual way of life and the ostensible meaning of what they were doing. On the one hand they seemed to be repenting, yet on the other hand the prophet says that their fasting ended in quarreling and strife and violence (Isa. 58:4). In addition, despite their religious pretenses, the clear implication is that they were oppressing others and slandering them (Isa, 58:9). They had developed the disturbing tendency to act religious while continuing with their own selfish ways.

## Jesus

It is a tendency that Jesus also found very much in evidence when he was on earth. He encountered a group of the most religious and highly respected people of his time called the Pharisees. They were fastidious in their practice of all Old Testament rules and all the interpretations of those rules by the Jewish authorities. They wanted to get things right and be perfectly holy from a Levitical law point of view.

But Jesus pointed out to them that there was a big problem. All of their observances of the law had no heart in them. They were not concerned about people at all. They served themselves. They desired recognition. Even when they gave tithes, it was not about generosity, it was about law-keeping. Matthew chapter 23 is an exposé of Jesus’ teaching against them. The problem was not so much that the exact things they were doing were wrong; sometimes they were things commanded in the law. The problem was that there was no sense of service and love for others guiding their hearts.

## Wesley

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, lived in an era when religion had again degenerated in similar ways. The high Anglicanism into which John Wesley was born was a very liturgical faith that emphasized creed and church attendance but did not emphasize personal religious experience or holy living. It addition, the religion of the day did not seem to have a response to the rapidly deteriorating social conditions in England in the early decades of the industrial revolution. Even though Wesley was raised as a pastor’s child, was being educated at Oxford, and was himself on track for ordination as an Anglican priest, he testified that he did not have an assurance of his own faith. It was this lack that opened Wesley to learn from his contacts with the Moravians. It was in contrast to this formalism that Wesley experienced and taught personal faith and a faith that was active in changing the social conditions around about.

## Today

There are many people today who prefer what I call innocuous religion, comfortable religion that doesn’t disturb anybody and doesn’t require much from its adherents except an occasional nod of agreement. This kind of religion doesn’t challenge us when we want to do something unbiblical. In our heart we don’t want to submit to any laws even the laws of God. This kind of religion doesn’t ask devotees for money; followers need that to support selfish lifestyles. This kind of religion understands when you can’t participate, you have a life. The only problem with this kind of low-commitment religion is that it doesn’t sound like Jesus!

# Jesus’ plain admonition

Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 25 is one of his plainest on the essential need for us to be involved in volunteer service to others.

How can we describe the service to others Jesus is aiming for in this teaching?

## Service is unaffected, unstudied, self-giving

In the parable of Jesus, the righteous gave food, gave drink, gave hospitality, gave clothes, gave healing care (sick), and gave time and attention (visit). But there was something unusual about it - it was uncalculating giving. People who give for effect are not surprised by recognition, they have planned their effort in order to receive attention. But the righteous in this story are surprised by God’s recognition of their giving. This suggests to me that the kind of giving in human service that pleases God is natural. It happens naturally out of love. It is never looking for returns or rewards. This is what is spoken of in Gal 5:13 "Serve one another in love."

This agrees with Jesus’ teaching in another place when he described the nature of discipleship.

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Mark 8:34 NIV

## Service meets human needs

One of the big surprises we find in this part of Jesus’ teaching is what the heavenly king approved in the righteous. We might expect the heavenly king to look for overtly religious deeds like church attendance, prayers, Bible memory work, church teaching, fasting, self-denials or even persecutions or martyrdoms. But none of these are mentioned as reasons why people were placed on King’s right hand in this story. Instead all of the actions mentioned had to do with meeting real needs of people in trouble.

But I suppose we would not be so surprised if we had taken time to look at Jesus’ statement of ministry intention in Luke 4:18,19.

 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”
Luke 4:18-19

Reading this, we can see that Jesus aimed to meet the real spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of people. Then when we review the gospel records, we find that is just what he did. For example, look at this brief list summary of the life of Jesus in Matthew.

 4:23 teaching good news and healing

 5:1 teaching

 8:1 healing man with leprosy

 8:5 healing of centurion’s servant

 8:14 Peter's moth-in-law

 8:28 demon-possessed man

 9:1 paralytic healed - sins forgiven

 14:19 healed sick, fed 5000

We conclude immediately that Jesus was personally involved in meeting real life needs.

There was for Jesus no disunity between meeting spiritual, physical, and emotional needs in his ministry. Jesus obviously viewed man as a whole. Attempts of some to limit ministry to spiritual or of others to focus only on the social part are misguided. Jesus served the whole person.

This implies for us that while serving one another in church is fine, it cannot be the end of our service. The purpose of our service here in the house of God is in order that we can do what Jesus did-- meet both the spiritual needs and other kinds of needs of people as we meet them in our everyday lives.

## Relation to salvation by faith

An essential question for us to ask is, “How does this teaching of Jesus relate to salvation by faith. There is no mention of faith here as the way to heaven. Is this passage teaching another way of salvation?

For help we turn to James 2:14-24 (read)

I would summarize what we are learning today this way. At the great judgment, Jesus will be looking for two things. First and most crucially, what did we do with Jesus?

Second, as evidence for the first, how did we treat other people?

"If anyone says, `I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen cannot love God, whom he has not seen."
I John 4:20

So service to others is not another way of salvation, it is the necessary evidence of the one and only way, faith in Jesus!

Jesus is saying that when he hands out rewards, he won’t be looking for mystical spiritual experiences, or even certain confessions of faith. Rather he’ll be looking for evidences of love in service to others.

Gal. 5:6 “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

# Opportunities now

So the kind of prayer and fasting that most pleases Jesus has legs.

What kinds of practical service are we about today individually and as a church?

**5 suggested wise ways that compassion can be expressed in action.**

1. Give to an organization that is making a practical difference in Jesus’ name -- UMCOR, World Hope, World Vision. We at Copper Hill are doing this today by taking an offering to help those who have lost so much in the storms.
2. Become a volunteer in an organization that is making a difference. Be a teacher or trustee, or a singer, or whatever God leads you to be in our local church. It takes many volunteers to make our local church operate.

Volunteer in your community:

Volunteer firemen

Food pantry volunteer

Volunteer helpers at nursing homes or with others of the aging population

Prepare to help at disaster sites. Training for disaster response Nov. 4 Simsbury UMC

1. Do an act of service for a friend or neighbor in need. Currently have several; hospitalized or recovering from surgery
2. Volunteer for a good cause. Use your political voice to support those with little or no voice – the unborn, the immigrant (often called “the alien among you” in the Bible), the poor, the disenfranchised, and the mentally ill.

# Conclusion

Chicken Soup for the Christian Family Soul p. 188 A Brand New Pair of Shoes