

Life Comes Through Death, We Gain by Giving & Greatness Comes Through Service

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Thank you Youth Choir. You are incredible and have been through this entire trip. Parents and church family, this group represented you so well. And Danny did an outstanding job in putting it together and making it a very positive and rewarding experience. I do believe God has been honored by our efforts. Also, I need to say what a wonderful group of chaperones we had. Just a great event to have been a part of.

Our theme has been about “Surrender” and our passage of scripture helps us focus on this topic. Briefly I want to share with you three points plainly given in the verses Kristy read.

Back in my college days while I was part of the BSU we had to decide who would be selected as president to take over for the next year. I had just broken up with the love of my life, Joy Willingham. She crushed me and it had devastated me, I hurt very badly. Yet, she was the obvious choice for president and I had the deciding vote. It was hard! Mr. Caylor, our BSU director, in his wisdom put his arm around me and said, “Sometimes you have to put your personal pride aside and surrender. You have to put your own feelings aside and do what is best for the entire group.”

He wanted me to say, “You know you’re right Mr. Caylor, she is the obvious choice.” What I said was a mumbled, “Yeah, that’s ok.” He took that as to mean I agreed so they said, ok, that’s it, she’s elected.

I bring that up as a chance to say that in our lives there comes a time when surrender is the very best thing and most important thing for us to do. You just have to give it up. There comes those moments in our lives.

I’m gonna tie that back in just a minute but I want us to look at the passage Kristy read just a moment ago. There are three main things that stand out from what she read that are applicable to all of us here today. Basically these things include that life comes through death, we gain by giving and we recognize greatness comes through service.

The first, life comes through death, is in verse 24: I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

The first thing I noticed when we got to Ahooskie last Thursday was the wheat. It took me back to my days in Texas. I had never paid much attention before, but one day the fields were suddenly “white unto harvest”. The whole wheat idea is amazing, but I never knew until I explored a little.

Here's how it works: a farmer harrows the soil to break it up and smooth it out. He then digs shallow trenches to create a bed for the seeds. Finally, he drops the wheat seeds into the trench, covers them with the loosened soil, prays for rain, and waits for the Lord of the harvest to go to work.

In Jesus' day, farmers would drop one grain of wheat at a time. Remarkably, they still do it that way today. Out in the great breadbasket of America—out in Kansas and Nebraska and South Dakota—wheat farmers go out to their field and pull a "grain drill" through it. This machine houses a notched wheel that revolves in such a way as to drop seed through a tube and into the trench exactly one grain at a time. The single grain lies there in the bosom of the earth gathering moisture and nutrients to itself, and one day it sends tiny root hairs down into the soil, and then it shoots a stem upward toward the surface.

The result is remarkable not only because a dead seed generates life, but especially because it generates so *much* life. Two bushel of seed can produce forty or fifty bushel of wheat. It is amazing how much it gives, but it starts with the seed dying in the ground.

I believe the moment we give our hearts to Jesus we become as kernels of wheat. As we allow ourselves to surrender our wills to His, it is as if we have died. That is when the growth takes place. God can take us and use us for His purposes. We just have to be willing to put ourselves aside.

Let's move on . . .

The second message, we gain by giving, begins in verse 25: The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

We are all born with an innate desire to live. God gave us that. It is the reason people with terminal illnesses fight so hard. That is NOT what the writer is referring to in verse 25.

Jesus talks about the man who loves his life. He is talking about the person who is only interested in himself. It is the person who does not want to be inconvenienced for any reason, even if it will help someone. There are two characteristics of such a person.

The first is Selfishness.

Our society makes a strong emphasis toward success. It pushes us to do whatever it takes to get to the top. Only those who are able to elevate themselves can be considered accomplished.

There is the story of Ralph L. Woods, an ambitious farmer, unhappy about the yield of his crops, heard of a highly recommended new seed corn. He bought some and produced a crop that was so abundant his astonished neighbors asked him to sell them a portion of

the new seed. But the farmer, afraid that he would lose a profitable competitive advantage, refused.

The second year the new seed did not produce as good a crop, and when the third-year crop was still worse it dawned upon the farmer that his prize corn was being pollinated by the inferior grade of corn from his neighbors' fields. Maybe being selfish is not the best route to take?! The scripture reminds us that the man who loves his life will lose it.

The second is Security.

Is there one among us this morning who does not care to feel secure? We pay big money to have security systems in our homes. Just two weeks ago in my neighborhood we had two break-ins and an attempted third. Neither of the three had their security system armed, but they pay big money to have it.

Just that one event caused quite a stir. People began to ask questions about their safety and the safety of our neighborhood. My next door neighbor had the security man at her place the next week and a deal done before he left.

You know people who love their lives. They may be very successful, or maybe they are not. No matter. IF they are a person who loves their life, more than likely they have never died to themselves and will not count much for God's purposes. They will never truly live.

The final message is, greatness comes through service, is found in verse 26: Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

It is the whole idea of servanthood. "Whoever serves me must follow me". It is something we cannot do with a "serve me" mindset.

We are continually working to make sure our students have opportunity to serve. It was central in our trip this past week. It gives them a sense of fulfillment when they see they have made a difference. People who make a difference, or those who serve, are the people we all remember. Can you think of some of those in your life?

I think of the Mr. Clark's or the Miss Bookhart's, English teachers I am certain I exasperated nearly everyday who despite my sarcasm and attitude decided they would help me be better. I think of the Mr. Caylor's (BSU director I mentioned earlier) who poured their lives into college students to help prepare them for the real world. I think of coaches and other volunteers who gave up their time to enrich mine.

Serving is something we can all do. When we serve others we focus less on ourselves. When we focus on others it gives us opportunity to make a difference in lives while enriching our own.

This morning I see that we have some options. We are going to sing Hymn 275 – I Surrender All. As we sing, I need you to think about your own life.

Those who have never made a decision for Christ – never asked Him to come into your life.

Those who have made the decision, but have never died to self so that God might use you for His purposes. You are still just a seed.

Those who are looking for a place to serve. VBS begins tonight. I am only guessing, but I imagine Kelly could use any of you who feel you want to make a difference in the lives of our children.

Whatever your decision this morning, I will be here at the front to greet you. Come as we sing.