

09/04/11

Living Life Together by Celebrating Everyone's Place on the Team

- Let's suppose we asked you to go around our church, or any other church you've been a part of for that matter, and line up our church family on the basis of who you believe would be most rewarded in heaven...from top to bottom...
 - how well do you think you'd do?...
 - and then if there was a way some day to compare that to what Scripture calls the Judgment Seat of Christ...how close do you think your analysis would be to the Lord's?...
- would we all agree this morning that the answer is – there would be significant differences...we would all be way off...do you think that's true?...
 - why is that?...why would it be a mistake to make evaluations today about who is a valuable part of the church family and who isn't?...
 - I can think of at least two reasons...
 1. The issue of motivation...
 - that's why at the judgment seat of Christ...which Scripture tells us is for genuine Christians...this is different than the Great White Throne judgment which is for those who do not know the Lord...
 - the judgment seat of Christ is for believers...and here's what the Bible tells us about that...
 - **1 Corinthians 3:12-15 - Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.**
 - see, why wouldn't we be judged with a tape measure, or a scale – why isn't the issue raw amount of what's done for God?...and what does the fire even reveal?...
 - the answer is that it reveals motivation...one of the sobering truths in Scripture about all of this is that you or I could do all sorts of works ostensibly for God, for truthfully...for all sorts of wrong reasons...
 - and that would never be apparent to anyone....maybe not even completely to ourselves...until it is tested...by fire...
 - and Paul says – the fire will test...what sort it is...
 - and it is highly likely that one's position in the line will change dramatically after the fire dies down...and for some that will be good...and for others it won't...
- but there's a second reason why our evaluation would be flawed if we tried to do it today...
 - so much of what really matters to God is done behind the scenes...
 - you're not going to know about it in this life...the person wouldn't even want you to...
 - but God knows...
- **Hebrews 6:10 - For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.**

- Paul used this principle to help us not treat one another in a judgmental fashion...he said it this way in the very next chapter in 1 Corinthians...

- **1 Corinthians 4:3-5 - But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by *any* human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men's* hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.**

- so there's no question about the fact that man's evaluation of who/what's important and God's evaluation may be [and for most of us, certainly will be] dramatically different...

- now, here's why I'm raising this issue...this morning we're going to look at a passage of Scripture that tells a delightful story of a little known character in the Word of God...

- but the text makes it clear – that in many ways she exemplified how men and women in the early church lived life together...

- that's why her story is so important for us to study today...

- with that in mind, please open your Bible to Acts chapter 9...page 100 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...

- our theme this year is **Living Life Together**...what does it mean for our church or any church to be a place where it is easy for men and women to feel/be connected?...to quickly and easily plug into authentic friendships and meaningful ministry opportunities...

- and what we're going to observe today can help us **Living Life Together by Celebrating Every Person's Place on the Team**...

- read Acts 9:32-42

- so we're talking about Living Life Together by Celebrating Every Person's Place on the Team....and with the time we have remaining, let's talk about **three steps to making the church an authentic representation of Christ.**

I. Decide Whose Team You're On.

- there's no question about the fact that the men and women in the story were celebrating Tabitha's life and mourning her death...

- they viewed her as an important member of their team...

- well, let's not miss the fact that she took definite steps to identify herself with them...

- in other words...

A. Declare your allegiance to the King.

- **Acts 9:36 – there was a disciple named Tabitha...**

- the word disciple is feminine form of the Greek word mathntes...

- it's the same word Jesus used in the Great Commission...

- **Matthew 28:19-20 - Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**

- the word make disciples is the verb form of the way Tabitha is described here...

- the point is – this is the kind of product Jesus is seeking to produce...

- someone who decided who her teacher...who her Savior...who her Lord is going to be...

- now here's why I wanted to make that point...it's just to be sure everyone attending our church right now understands that becoming a Christian is a specific decision a person makes at a definite point in time...
 - I mentioned this passage in passing last week...but here it is again... **Romans 10:9-10 - that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation...Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.**
 - my concern is that someone could start attending our church, or maybe attend for a long time, who believes something like, "I've always been a Christian...I just eased into this gradually...I was never really lost so I never had to be redeemed..."
 - all of that would be contrary to what we're seeing throughout this book...men and women making a specific decision to repent – to turn around and go the other way – to make an about-face from one kind of belief and behavior and head the opposite direction...
 - and of course the question I would have for every person here is whether you have clearly decided whose team you're on...just like Tabitha did...
 - do you...[can you say it with me]...know that you know that you know...
 - and I realize you might respond with – but can a person truly have that kind of assurance...
 - and the people who have been around our church for a while would say under their breath – I know where this is leading – to one of Steve's favorite verses...
 - **1 John 5:13 - These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.**
 - if you've never clearly and specifically made that decision like Tabitha did – we would invite you to either do so right now, or take steps to find answers to your remaining questions and then do so...
- now, what does this have to do with serving like Tabitha did – that's a really important question...the principle is...
- B. Focus your attention on pleasing Him.**
- that's why I read the earlier portion about Peter and Aeneas...
 - **Acts 9:34 - Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed." Immediately he got up.**
 - Peter wanted to be absolutely sure that there was no question whatsoever about the source and motivation of his service...
 - the resurrection really humbled Peter...and gave his life a focus and purpose and satisfaction that his previous life of pride and boasting could never match...
 - that's why he would later say...
 - **1 Peter 4:11 - Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**
- so the first question this morning would be – are you like Tabitha in that you are self-declared disciple of Jesus Christ...and your service is motivated to please and honor Him?...
 - now, what else can we learn from this delightful woman's life?

II. Find a Need and Compassionately Meet It.

- Fulfilling the mission God has given us is not rocket science...
- it's simply letting Jesus transform your life and changing your focusing from living for you to living for others...

A. With deeds and compassion.

- 9:36 – deeds of kindness and charity.

- the fact of the matter is, in this sin cursed world – people living like Tabitha are going to make a powerful impact...because they are going to stand out as living in a way that is so contrary many times to those without the Lord...
- here's an extreme example for sure...but it just happened...
- as the reporters were granted greater access to Tripoli after the apparent fall of Moammar Gadhafi's reign, they came across this woman whom they first thought was wearing a hat and a veil...
- what they saw on closer observation was that she was covered with scars after being badly burned...
- as it turns out, she was a refugee from Ethiopia and was hired by Gadhafi's son Hannibal and his wife Aline to be the nanny for their children.
- when the child, who of course was one of Gadhafi's grandchild, would not stop crying and Aline wouldn't stop the noise...Aline took the nanny into the bathroom, bound her hands behind her back, tied her feet, put tape over her mouth and then poured scalding water over her head and body.
- some of the scars were from an event several months ago...some more recent...
- sometimes I think we forget how brutal this world can be without Christ...and I'm certainly not suggesting everyone who doesn't know the Lord behaves like this and everyone who does know Him doesn't...
- but...against a tapestry of selfishness and mean-spirited harshness that many people in our world face all the time...even a little bit of kindness and charity goes a long way...
- this is Caleb Conner...Caleb was a faithful member of our College Class and also part of the ROTC program at Purdue...
- when Caleb and his fellow cadets were being commissioned as new officers, each of the young men was allowed to speak about the experience...
 - one cadet spoke about coming to Purdue from another country...(???)
 - and how challenging it was to go through the program...especially because he didn't have any transportation and had to get to the campus early in the morning for drill...
 - and he went on to say that it became especially hard in the winter...until a fellow cadet learned of his plight and offered to get up early and drive out to pick him up in his car and drive him to the drill so he didn't have to be out in the cold...
 - and that person who befriended him was our own Caleb Conner...
- Caleb was a quiet young man – never said anything about what he was doing...
- the only reason I know about it was because Caleb was roommates with my new son-in-law Austin...so Karis and Austin went to Caleb's commissioning service and unbeknownst to everyone, this young man got up and told that story as an illustration of true friendship that helped him persevere through the program...
- see friends, that's what Tabitha would have done...and that's why we would need to celebrate everyone's place on the team...because there are all sorts of people around here

who just go around quietly serving God...that's what living life together looks like, and feels like...

- **Colossians 1:10** - so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

- not, what else can we note about the way this woman served?...

B. With abundance and faithfulness.

- **9:36** – *abounding* with deeds of kindness and charity which she *continually* did.

- Paul told the Corinthians...

- **2 Corinthians 9:8** - And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

- see, that's Tabitha kind of living...not just doing the bare minimum...and not just a flash in the pan...

- I thank the Lord for the many men and women who fit this description here...

- is a question formulating in your mind, perhaps even a couple of them?...

1. Do you celebrate people like Tabitha?...

2. Are you taking steps to serve in this way?...

- [cf. love seeing college students serving in the community center...

- if you're not sure where/how to get started...come to our Intro class, or our FBC Connect...

- could also talk about Passion Play – never see the folks doing the flies, or the stage crew, the people doing makeup in the basement, people praying in the overflow room....

- now, here's another observation we need to make...

C. In specific ways.

- Tabitha did not serve in fuzzy land...

- **Acts 9:39** - ...**all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them.**

- see, this dear woman was concerned for the older widows in the church...and apparently she didn't just sit around and think about it...or talk about...she did something to serve them...

- and yes it's true that the primary purpose of this passage is to show the fact that this woman died, and God used Peter to perform a miracle of bringing her back to life...

- what a marvelous and miraculous thing...and by verse 42 – many people were believing in the Lord...

- but we also need to see – that wasn't the beginning of the story nor was it the beginning of God working in this situation...

- you have all these widows who have been impacted because of Tabitha's service...and that too was a demonstration of the power of God working in someone's life...

- now, let's pull over there and park for a little while...there are applications screaming out everywhere...

- time doesn't allow us to do this as thoroughly as we might like, but it is amazing how this kind of lifestyle typifies the way the early church lived life together...graciously and sacrificially serving and meeting needs...that was an essential aspect of how they both proclaimed and lived the gospel...
- and it began at the very beginning simply as a natural result of the gospel of grace...
- **Acts 2:45-47 - and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.**
- **Acts 4:32-35 - And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of *them* claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.**
- I'm not talking about some sort of religious communism here...but this is essential to what it meant...and what it means...to live life together...
- let me bring that around and talk about how this impacts our ministry strategy at Purdue...
- you know that one of the primary projects we decided to tackle as part of our current 5 year strategic ministry plan was to purchase a piece of property and build a student ministry center for our PBF ministry and a biblical counseling center for staff and students on campus...
- we've been working on that for several years...
 - we started by planning to buy a site right across from Mackey – a great location but the city and the neighbors felt like it was too small – and it probably was...
 - then we went up the road and signed a contract to purchase Smitty's...and that looked good but the owners have run into some environmental challenges and are unsure when the property will be suitable for constructing what we want to build there...
 - as you may know, there's another site just up Northwestern where the old Family Inn used to sit...
- most recently it was the proposed site for Champion's Center...and at one time that was a very promising project...over 4.4 million dollars was loaned against the site by various banks and individuals...
 - they received an approved Planned Development which was very high density...
 - then they were not successful and the site eventually went into foreclosure and investors and banks literally lost millions of dollars there...
- right now property values are dramatically reduced...which to us means that property that was one time out of reach are priced differently today by necessity...especially in foreclosure situations...
- you also may know that we have a prayer team that has been faithfully praying about this for years...literally...

- and Kevit Brown, their leader, recently told us that several of their team had wondered among themselves whether God was just preparing us for something bigger incrementally...
- please take that for what it is...I'm not saying there was any special revelation there, no audible voices...just a good group of people trying to discern God's will...
 - that's why we had a day earlier this year of prayer and fasting...we want to follow God's will...
 - and one of the issues that has surfaced is – a larger site would allow us to set ourselves up to possibly plant a church there...there are no plans or guarantees...it's just a statement of fact...
- so a week from tonight, we will be voting on buying the former Champion's Center site for 1.85 million dollars...dramatically less than at least what some people valued it at just a few years ago...but still a very significant investment...
- now I'll say some more about the money piece in a minute...
- but let me tell you how we would approach this project...
- you may also know that one of the best organized homeowner associations is located in this very area...and I think it is fair to say that they are not particularly pro-development...
- but before you fault them – get in your car and drive around the road that surrounds this property and see how many of them have been turned into student housing and how many are not kept up very well and then ask yourself how you would feel about the subject...
- now here's the question...how does a church approach a situation like this?...
- can this passage help us?...the answer is – just like Tabitha would...just like a group of people who believe in living life together in a biblical, sacrificial, compassionate fashion...
- so we go to the neighbors, and we ask them to help us identify the needs that they see in their area that an organization like us can meet...but we design those spaces in such a way that they could easily be used as a church on Sundays if we ever decided to do so...
- and what do you think we'll hear?...
 - the need for infant care – we know how to do that – and that kind of ministry pays for itself and actually generates some operating funds for other things...
 - you meet that need M-F, and that space easily begins your eventual nursery at no additional cost...
- so here's our proposal – seek to raise 3 million dollars in our capital campaign this fall to build a student ministry center and biblical counseling center and purchase the ground on which it sits...
 - but develop the rest of the property with a cluster of ministries that address legitimate community needs and a cluster of student ministry housing, with a conservative business plan that comfortably repays the debt...put together in such a way that the same facility could be used as another site for our church either now or in the future at no additional cost...
- now, there's one more detail about this passage...and it sets us up for a much larger discussion next week...but it has to do with where Peter stayed...here's the principle...

III. Let's Ministry Opportunities Stretch You.

Acts 9:42 - It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

- Peter was like Tabitha – he let ministry opportunities stretch him...