

The Importance of One Life

Acts 9:36-42

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If you are looking to take a cruise of the Mediterranean, you might look up Royal Caribbean's Symphony of the Seas. It's one of the largest cruise ships in the world.

The ship is almost 1/4 of a mile long, measuring 1,184 feet in length. It has a gross tonnage of 228,081 across 18 decks.

She can accommodate 6,680 passengers. There are 22 restaurants, four pools, and 2,759 cabins.

Facilities include a children's water park, a full-size basketball court, an ice-skating rink, and two 43-foot rock-climbing walls. There is also a 'central park' which contains over 20,000 tropical plants.

That's a lot of ship! You may have been wowed by its description as I was. But when compared to the ocean, its size is insignificant. It's just a cork bobbing in a big pond.

Someone once told me that if you take the largest ship out of the ocean, the void it would leave would be filled so quickly by the water that would fill its place no one would notice its absence.

The first time I heard that analogy, it depressed me to think that if I were taken away from the roles that I have, the world isn't going to miss a beat. It's going to keep on turning.

Occasionally you hear of a church that folds or because the pastor leaves or dies. But we are Baptist. You'd just fix casseroles, say some nice words at the funeral, "I never thought he'd stay as long as he did," and you'd have someone preaching next Sunday.

Businesses, schools, banks, clubs, families, keep on existing whether we are here or not.

If something happened to the mayor of our city, would the city fold? If something happened to the President, would the country cease to exist? If something happened to the Pope, would Catholics stop being Catholic?

Tom Brady won six Superbowls as the quarterback of the New England Patriots. He will go down as the Greatest Of All Time, the G.O.A.T. of quarterbacks in the NFL.

His contract is over this year. Has the team said, "We can't go on without Tom! You led us to six Superbowls. Here's more money. Please stay."

"Nope. The Patriots are likely to say, "Thanks for the memories."

This is how the world works.

Wouldn't you like to think that there was somebody somewhere who just couldn't get along without you?

Wouldn't it make you feel a little more significant if the business you ran would fold if you weren't there?

Wouldn't you feel a little more important if the class you taught couldn't learn if you weren't teaching?

Some people get a case of the "arrogants" from time to time and need a reality check.

Paul gave one to the Christians at Rome when he wrote this: "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." Rom 12:3 NIV

The Psalmist also helps us keep things in perspective when he wrote these words:

15As for man, his days are like grass—
he blooms like a flower of the field;
16when the wind passes over, it vanishes,
and its place remembers it no more.
Psalm 103:15-16

Those verses are rather sobering. They keep us grounded.

But I don't think arrogance is the problem of most people. More people err at the opposite extreme.

The opposite of thinking too highly about ourselves is not thinking enough of ourselves.

Instead of thinking of ourselves as a big ship on the high seas, some of us feel like a rowboat without any oars or a bass boat that's missing a plug.

For those at this end of the spectrum, we need to hear a different message. We need affirmation.

We need to hear that our life has deep meaning, much value, and a real purpose. We need to know that we have a purpose and that our contribution matters, no matter how small.

We need to know that our labors are not in vain. We need to hear a word of encouragement.

If that's where you are, God's word has what you need this morning. I want to share an example of the simple life of a person who lived in a simple place among ordinary people. That's a good example to share because that's who we are. We are simple people. We live in a simple place among ordinary people.

The setting of this person's life is Joppa. Perhaps you remember that Joppa is the place where Jonah went to catch a boat to carry him to Tarshish. He didn't want to go to Nineveh as God had instructed him. He went to Joppa to get on a boat going away from Nineveh.

Joppa is the modern-day city of Joffa, located just to the south of Tel Aviv.

It's not a place of significance now or in biblical times.

In the Acts text, we discover that Jesus' disciples are in Joppa carrying out his work.

At this time, Peter was the leader of the Christian church, and the disciples he led were not far away from Joppa in the city of Lydda.

Joppa gets mentioned in the biblical text because one of Jesus' disciples lived there.

Was it James, John, Andrew, or Matthew? No, neither was it Bartholomew, Thaddaeus, or Thomas.

The disciple that lived in Joppa was Tabitha. That's an odd name for a man.

It's not a man. Tabitha was one of Jesus' female disciples.

True, she is not one of the original twelve, but she is called a disciple nonetheless. The word disciple simply means "a learner."

In the book of Acts, "disciple" is used for those who believed in Jesus and sought to incorporate his teachings in their lives.

Of all the adjectives that could be used of a person in the Bible, few are more important than being described as a "disciple of Jesus."

I hope you consider yourself one of Jesus' disciples. As a learner and a student of his teachings, we continue to find ways to live our lives as he lived his.

Calling ourselves "disciples" might even be a better term than calling ourselves a Christian because the word "Christian," now means so many different things.

If we are Jesus' disciple, we should find some assurance that our lives have a lasting impact on others.

Wouldn't you like to know that the work you are doing is making a difference in the lives around you? More than that, wouldn't you like to know that your work is making an eternal difference?

If you will set your sail in the breezes of the Holy Spirit and make it your life's goal to be a disciple of Jesus, the water that you displace in the ocean of life will make waves into the kingdom of heaven!

God created us in His image, and each person is designed differently and uniquely in God's sight.

God has created each of us physically, emotionally, and psychologically different. There's never been anyone exactly like you.

Not even cloning could make someone exactly like you because God has work for each person to do that is special and unique. The work of a disciple of Jesus is work that has been set aside and carved out, especially for you.

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Eph 2:10 NIV

If God has prepared these good works for you to do, then he hasn't created them for anyone else to do. God has something he wants YOU to do.

Tabitha was a disciple of Jesus. She was doing what God prepared in advance for her to do. Well, what was she doing?

It must have been important work. Did she become the first woman pastor at the First Church of Rome? Did she volunteer to be the first woman missionary to another country? Did she become the first woman martyr for the Christian faith?

No, the Bible simply says that she was always doing good and helping the poor.

That's it? That's all we know about the work that she did. That doesn't sound like a lot.

She wasn't an inventor. She didn't leave millions of dollars to a religious institution. She never authored a best seller. She wasn't an activist for an important cause.

The scriptures tell us that she did good all the time, and she helped the poor.

Maybe that doesn't sound like much to you, but to the people of Joppa, it was significant.

When Tabitha got sick and died, the widows she helped care for were beside themselves.

When Peter arrived at Joppa, the women that Tabitha had clothed stood around, grieving her death!

Who would clothe the poor? Who would come to their aid? Perhaps God would send another, but they knew that Tabitha was the one who had helped them.

The reality is that each one of us has something special and unique about us that God has called us to do. Yes, it is true; someone will fill the void of the positions we hold: teacher, farmer, banker, cashier, daycare worker, nurse, and many other professions. The world will keep going when we are gone.

But the truth is we are uniquely made by God, and because of this, the relationships we form can never be fully replaced by others.

Yes, there may be others who will hold one of your titles after you are gone, but no one will ever take your place. Because we are uniquely made in God's image, and because we have been given unique jobs to do by God, no one can do what God has set aside for you to do, exactly like you do it.

God has placed you where you are for a very important reason.

Jewish psychologist Laura Sleshinger has coined the phrase, "I am my child's mom."

She spends her talk shows trying to get parents, especially mothers, to take responsibility for filling parental roles in their children's lives because a mother and a father have a unique role to play in their children's lives.

God wants us to remember that we have roles to fill that only we can fill.

After Tabitha died, and Peter arrived, he went into the room where she was.

Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes and seeing Peter, she sat up!

He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. (Acts 9:39-42) NIV

Because Tabitha was given new life, these women had a unique opportunity to thank Tabitha again for giving to the Lord by investing in their lives. They might not have realized how important she was until she died. That's very true for us sometimes, too. We don't realize how important someone is to us until they are no longer with us.

There are people all around us that are making a huge difference in our lives and in the lives of our community.

Why wait until after their time with us is over to realize it? Show some appreciation to them now.

Why wait until they are gone before you realize the treasure they are?

As you serve, remember, the waves you make may not be felt across the ocean. You may not think you displace enough water to fill up a bathtub.

But Jesus said, “(Anyone that) gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward” (Matthew 10:42).

When you need to see the impact that your work has had, you need to make sure you are looking in the right place.

Remember the illustration I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon? If you took the largest ship out of the ocean, the void it left would not be noticed at all because the water would fill the void so fast no one would notice? Remember that?

Well, that’s a terrible illustration of whether the ship will be missed if it’s removed from the ocean.

A ship being missed has nothing to do with the amount of water it displaces but with the amount of cargo it successfully delivers.

When I hear Ray Boltz’s song, “Thank You for Giving to the Lord,” I am reminded of this.

In this song, Rays sings about a dream he had. He dreamed he went to heaven, and while he was there, he met people he crossed paths with on earth.

One was a boy that he taught Sunday School to when the boy was eight years old, and while in that class, the boy said a prayer and asked Jesus into his heart.

There was another man in his dream he’d never met, but because he gave money to a missionary that came to his church, the man heard the gospel, and Jesus came into his life.

One by one, in this dream, he met people in heaven, and the message from all of them was the same:

Thank you for giving to the Lord/ I am a life that was changed
Thank you for giving to the Lord/ I am so glad you gave.

In Ray Boltz’s song, he reminds us that people are the precious cargo that we are trying to get from earth to heaven.

Of course, we don’t get anybody to heaven. That’s Jesus’ business. But it is our job to be the transporters of the message, to share his love and his grace.

God has had you in mind to do this in specific ways to help advance the good news about Jesus. He has you in mind, especially, for some of these tasks.

Jesus invites you to follow him as his disciple.

Part of following him is to realize that you have a special job to do, to tell others about his love.

If we do our jobs, the numbers of heaven will grow.

When you put it that way, not a single person here should leave and not understand how important you are to the kingdom of God.

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