

## Missions 2017

I want to introduce you to **Angela**. I've never personally met Angela but this past Friday, Angela's story was shared with me by a couple of people who recently traveled down to the Houston, Texas area to help with the cleanup and rebuilding from Hurricane Harvey. During their time down there they met Angela. I share her story because I think it captures well the driving motivation behind all of missions and evangelism.

Angela's home was flooded a couple of years ago by a hurricane that swept through her area and left her home flooded. FEMA came in and helped her partially rebuild her home, including putting her home up on stilts to prevent it from future flooding. They also placed a large metal storage unit in her driveway and moved her salvageable possessions into it. It's still sitting there. As Angela was in the process of trying to rebuild her life and home, both of her parents passed away during the next year. The culmination of these life tragedies led Angela into a downward spiral emotionally and physically leading her into alcohol and drugs as a means of coping. Any rebuilding efforts have largely been put on hold during the past couple of years. And then in August, Hurricane Harvey swept through her area. The good news was that her home, because it was up on stilts wasn't harmed by the rising flood waters. However, the storage container holding the vast majority of her life possessions was flooded. Leaving most of her remaining possessions destroyed. When the rebuilding crew from Minneapolis churches showed up they were directed to Angela's house and instructed to remove Angela's possessions from the container because FEMA now needs it elsewhere in the country. So, for a whole day these men went through Angela's possessions discarding most of the stuff onto the curb for a waste removal truck to arrive. Angela was in and out of the scene emphasizing to the men that she was really trying to find a very special ring and was pretty sure it was in there somewhere. From the looks inside of the container Angela had attempted several times to locate the ring, since much of the contents were thrown all over the container. So, painstakingly and methodically the men went through everything and carefully set aside any form of jewelry and jewelry box. Angela periodically would come out and go through what they'd found so far, but when the ring was not among those items set aside would begin angrily yelling and swearing and then retreat back into the safety of her home. This went on all day long. And after they'd finished and were taking a much deserved rest, they suddenly heard Angela excitedly yelling and screaming at the top of her lungs, "**I found it, I found it.**" You can probably guess what Angela found. Though the vast majority of her life's meager possessions lay discarded on the curb labeled, "trash" what mattered the most was that her treasured ring had been found.

If Jesus were retelling the three parables found in Luke 15 of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son – I could see him including the story of Angela's lost ring. Mainly because it would be so like Jesus to lift up someone as an example who doesn't have his or her whole life put together. Remember the three parables were told by Jesus as a response to the Pharisees criticism of him that "*he welcomes sinners and eats with them.*" Jesus loves the Angela's of the world and wants to introduce the Angela's of the world to the greatest treasure they could ever know – their loving Heavenly Father.

In a powerful sermon on Missions, missionary **Paul Washer** makes the following statement, "*When I go to the mission field I don't go after the lost. I go after my family, my brothers and sisters who don't know about their Heavenly Father and I try to introduce them to Him by telling them about Him.*"

Later he says, "*We're not saved to merely or primarily to serve God. We're saved to sonship and out of that sonship we praise and serve God.*" I love love love that perspective.

Evangelism and missions were never intended by God to simply be a way to grow a church or a program by which we tell others the plan of salvation. I'm convinced that the best way by which others can be better equipped to share their faith is not by taking a class, or by reading an evangelism book or by watching someone else do it. Those are all good things. But I'm convinced that the best way to prepare someone to share their faith is by helping them develop a deeper relationship with one who saves us. Because generally, when we're really excited about something or someone we tell others about it.

- **Take the lowly shepherds.** What did they do after they encountered the new born baby Jesus? It says that they went out and told everyone about what they'd just experienced and everyone who heard them were amazed. (Luke 2:17-18)
- Or the **Samaritan woman at the well** – after Jesus encountered her and offered to give her a drink from which she'd never thirst again, it says that she hurried back to her home town, where she was likely looked down upon because her multiple failed relationships and her current living situation, but she was so excited about Jesus that none of this mattered. She went back and excitedly said to them, *"Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"* The woman's pure excitement, coupled with her words, no doubt inspired and compelled them to come out with her to meet this Jesus.
- Or **Peter and John** when they were hauled before the Jewish ruling council and ordered to quit talking about Jesus. They defiantly replied, *"As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."* (Acts 4:20)

Time and time again, people went and told others about Jesus, not because it was part of a plan but because they were genuinely excited for who they'd encountered and wanted others to share in their experience and joy.

Jesus describes this motivational excitement in the short little parable about receiving the kingdom of heaven when he said: *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."* (Matthew 13:44)  
Notice, the man didn't go buy this field because it was a wise real estate decision. No, he was motivated by joy. Are you motivated by joy and pure satisfaction in knowing Jesus that compels you to tell others about Jesus?

**Pastor John Piper** calls this compelling excitement about Jesus our personal "tipping point". He says, *"You can't share a satisfaction in God that you don't have. If God is not your supreme satisfaction, it is unlikely that you will reach the tipping point of pouring that satisfaction into others."*

And then he goes on with what I find an inspirational description of exactly who ought to compel us to share our faith and support others who are doing that out in the world.

*Christ is the best gift we have to give to the nations. But not a Christ who remains boring, or marginal, or uninteresting, or ineffective, or unsatisfying. The only Christ who is worth having is the true and real Christ! The glorious Christ! The all-satisfying Christ! The Christ that is so beautiful and so valuable, that when you know him, you have in him everything you will ever need or want. That's what I mean when I say: the best gift we have to give anyone anywhere in the world is full and everlasting joy in Christ, who is God incarnate.*

Is that the Christ you know? Is that the Christ you're excited to tell others about? Sadly and way too often, new Christians are the best evangelists because they exude this genuine love for and excitement about Jesus that's unstoppable. But shouldn't it be that the longer a person is in a relationship with Jesus Christ the greater depth of love and connection we have about Him and the more likely that we feel compelled to share Him with others. I don't think we should be sharing Christ with others because we don't want them spending eternity in Hell but because we don't want them to miss out on this incredible all satisfying relationship we have with Jesus.

Now, let's expand our horizons a bit as I wrap up this sermon. This joy in Christ I've been talking about, this joy that ought to compel us to tell others is also the same joy that should compel us to give so that others around the world might know about Jesus. And that's what missions is all about. It's about not just keeping Jesus to ourselves but wisely investing in enabling others to share the love and message of Jesus with others who we may never encounter this side of heaven.

I think **Psalm 67** is a perfect missions psalm. It's only 5 verses long but it's all about using the many blessings God has given each of us and this church to spread the great news about Jesus Christ and God.

**Psalms 67 (NIV)** *May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us **so that***

What comes next? If you listen to many preachers and teachers today you might expect it to say:

- We will be wealthy and healthy and prosper
- So that we might build bigger buildings
- So that we might hire more staff and fund our programs

*your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you.*

God has indeed blessed this church and everyone of us in such a way that we ought to desire to give generously towards missions so that others might continue to have the opportunity to know the great news about God's love for them expressed in and through the person of Jesus Christ.