

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

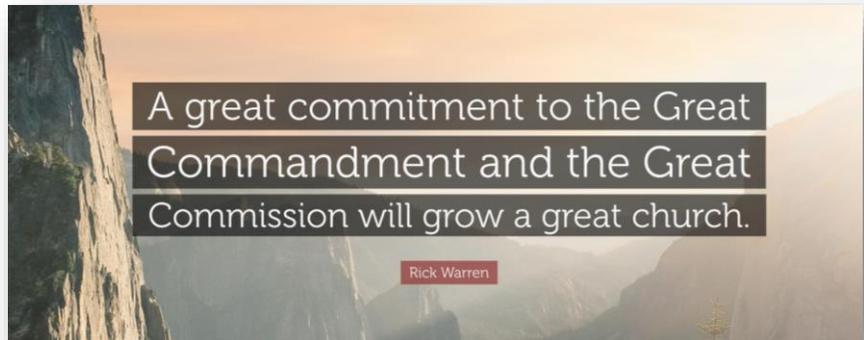
March 28, 2017

Rick Warren and I were in the same graduating class at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas in December, 1979. Since then, Rick has served one congregation, which he started, and I've served five, none of which I founded. And today, Rick's name is known all over the world, while mine, well, not so much. But that's all perfectly okay.

I celebrate all that God has used Rick to do, and I'm very grateful for what God has allowed me to do. Rick has the gift of teaching, and he is very good at one-liners of various sorts. One of my favorite "Rick-isms" is this one:

"A Great Commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission will grow a Great Church."

I'm pretty sure you know what he's referring to here, but just in case a reminder would be helpful, here they are:



The Great

Commandment: *"The most important [commandment]," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31).*

The Great Commission: *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).*

Though it has communal dimensions, the Great Commandment mostly has to do with our personal walk with God; and though it has personal dimensions, the Great Commission mostly has to do with our communal obedience to God. To put the Great Commandment and the Great Commission another way, **the more deeply we are in a love relationship with God, the more eager we are to introduce others to such love.**

Or to say this yet another way, **God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation** (2 Corinthians 5:19).

If we are followers of Jesus, then the Great Commandment and the Great Commission are what our whole lives are about, no matter what else we may do and no matter what we may do for a living. In the novel, *The Agony & the Ecstasy*, there is a scene in which Michelangelo's friend Soggi tries to persuade him to abandon his study of sculpture and to pursue a more profitable trade. "After all," Soggi notes, "sculpture is the last art form to be commissioned by the wealthy families of Florence. There is no money in it and no future. It is the last of the luxuries, at the very bottom of the list."

And Michelangelo answers his friend, "Sculpture is at the top of my list, Soggi. In fact, there is no list. I say 'sculpture,' and I'm finished."¹ That's the same idea I'm trying to communicate here. **We say "Jesus!" and we're finished**, so to speak.

Sharing the Good News of Jesus is not difficult, really. Peter wrote that we are to *"always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect"* (1 Peter 3:15).

I was in a conversation earlier today in which I suddenly became aware of an opportunity to invite someone closer to Jesus. In that moment, I prayed one of my favorite four-letter prayers ("HELP!"); and within a couple of minutes a path became clear to me. Such is God's promised help to us, and I give thanks! (Luke 12:11-12).

God's offer of love and forgiveness that entered our world through Jesus' death and resurrection is Good News that every person in every generation needs to hear. You and I need to take seriously our own sharing of that Good News with the persons with whom we have relationships; and we need to take seriously our stewardship of God's resources so that that Good News can be preached to every person in the world (Matthew 24:14).

We at CBF are a generous lot, and in most years, we give more than our budget requires. That's a good thing. But here's the deal. Current statistics are that American Christians give, on average, somewhere between 2.5-3.5% of our incomes to God's Kingdom work. Since CBF is surely, like Lake Wobegon, "a little above average," let's say we average 3.3%.

If 3.3% is our average, that means if we were all tithing (10%), we'd be giving three times as much as we currently do. So what would we do with all that money? (I actually had a physician ask me that, once: "If I were to tithe, what would the church do with all that money?")

Well, here's the deal. **If American Christians were all tithing, that would generate \$165 billion** (that's a "B") **additional dollars . . . every year**. Mike Holmes, a stewardship guru, reports that:²



- \$25 billion could relieve global hunger, starvation, and deaths from all preventable diseases within five years.
- \$12 billion could eliminate illiteracy around the world in five years.
- \$15 billion could solve global clean water and sanitation issues.
- \$1 billion would fully fund all the missionaries in the world.
- \$112 billion would still be left over for additional ministries here at home.
- EVERY YEAR.

Those are some truly amazing numbers. Yes, I know this is pretty theoretical; but here's what NOT theoretical. Our congregation is already involved in supporting the following missionary endeavors (among others), and every one of these ministries could do even more amazing things if we TRIPLED our support to them:

1. Backyard Bible Clubs here in Columbia
2. Baptist World Alliance Global World Relief

¹ Irving Stone, *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (Doubleday, 1961).

² <http://archives.relevantmagazine.com/god/church/what-would-happen-if-church-tithed>

3. Clean Water Wells in Ghana
4. Food for the Homeless at Route 1 Day Center here in Columbia
5. Grace of God Children's Project in Eldoret, Kenya
6. Help End Homelessness Howard County
7. Huehuetenango Youth Ranch in Guatemala
8. NEMCO Youth Camp in Jamaica
9. Packages of Love for the Homeless here in Columbia
10. The Coalition for Compassion and other Benevolence here in Columbia
11. The Fire & Light Community Church in Reisterstown
12. The Tribe Community Church with Law Enforcement Personnel in PG County
13. Wednesday Meals for the Youth of Oakland Mills

When I think about all this, I get excited! And this is over and above what we may be doing individually, outside the ministries of CBF.

My friends, there are more people open to the Good News of Jesus today than ever before in the history of the world. And the way we earn the right to tell them about Jesus is to give ourselves fully and completely, first to the Great Commandment, and then to the Great Commission.

Jesus' half-brother, James, put it this way: *"Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead"* (James 2:15-17).

This Eastertide, let's be faith-full!!

Dave

