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Sermon Notes

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The Eternally Glorious Sacrifices of the Great Commission

Luke 24:44-53

Our annual Lottie Moon Christmas offering:

Every year at this time, Southern Baptists collect money for missions from every local church which desires to participate... the offering is named the “Lottie Moon Christmas Offering” in honor of a missionary woman who served in China for 39 years from 1873 till her death on December 24, 1912. She ran a school for girls in Tengchow and then in Pingdu. She burned with a strong passion to win lost girls and women in China to faith in Christ.

She regularly baked fresh cookies to attract lost people to her home, and she would share the gospel with them. She totally immersed herself in the Chinese culture, adopting Chinese dress and customs to identify with the people.

She wrote moving and passionate letters to Christians in the United States begging for money and missionaries to come reach the lost for Christ.

Lottie’s letters home detailed China’s hunger for truth and the struggle of so few missionaries taking the gospel to the 472 million Chinese in her day. She also shared the urgent need for more workers and for Southern Baptists to support them through prayer and giving.

She once wrote home to the Foreign Mission Board, “Please say to the [new] missionaries they are coming to a life of hardship, responsibility and constant self-denial.”

Disease, turmoil and lack of co-workers threatened to undo Lottie's work. But she gave herself completely to God, helping lay the foundation of what would become the modern Chinese church, one of the fastest-growing Christian movements in the world.

She died as a direct result of sacrificing her food for the starving people of China when there was a famine.

The Women's Missionary Union started the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering in 1918 to honor her sacrifices and to move Southern Baptists to similar sacrifices for the sake of the gospel.

The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering makes up more than half of the annual budget for the International Mission Board. Last year, Southern Baptists gave \$158.9 million to the LMCO, which represented 60% of the IMBs budget of \$264.4 million. This money pays for the expenses of almost 3700 missionaries worldwide.

FBCs goal this year is \$150,000... and it is our desire that every man, woman, and child at FBC prayerfully consider sacrificial giving to support the advance of the gospel to the ends of the earth. It is easy to forget about our missionaries and the people in the world who have never heard the name of Christ. But the Lord Jesus Christ, after his resurrection gave to the Church the Great Commission of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. There are actually five different versions of this same commission. I want to walk through the one at the end of Luke's gospel. I want you to see the breathtaking prophetic vision of the spread of the gospel that Jesus links to the Old Testament prophecies. I want to celebrate the central sacrifice at the heart of the gospel... the death of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Secondly, I want to celebrate some of the countless sacrifices made by our brothers and sisters in the twenty centuries that have followed Christ's resurrection. Thirdly, I want to call each of you to sacrificial involvement in the Great Commission yourselves.

I. The Central Sacrifice of the Great Commission: The Death of Christ

Luke 24:44-47 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." 45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

A. The Centerpiece of the Gospel: The Death of Christ

1. The scene was powerful and poignant... Christ had died on the cross
2. On the third day, he came to life again
3. The women had just returned from the tomb and declared it to be empty
4. They had had an encounter with the risen Lord in which he told them to report what they had seen to the disciples in the Upper Room in Jerusalem
5. That Upper Room was the place where Christ had shared the Last Supper with his tiny church, his small band of followers
6. Now they were assembled there in fear and bewilderment
7. John's Gospel tells us that the doors were locked for fear of the Jews
8. In Luke's Gospel, the reaction is emotional and powerful

Luke 24:36-43 Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. 38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." 40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to

eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate it in their presence.

9. Jesus is offering them “many convincing proofs that he was alive”... Why? Because they could not believe their eyes... it seemed TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE
10. Luke says “they did not believe it because of JOY”... that’s as close to the statement, “TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE” you will ever find in the Bible
11. Dead people just don’t come alive again... dead people stay dead. And this resurrection is of a different order than any miracle Jesus had ever done
12. But Jesus has to go beyond this... he has to explain the reason for his sufferings, and the plan for the world from now on

B. Jesus Explains His Suffering... and Roots it In the Prophetic Writings

1. They still did not understand why Jesus had to suffer and die
2. It would take decades for the full theology of the New Covenant to be worked out by the Apostle Paul in the Book of Romans, as well as by the other Apostles in their various writings
3. But Jesus establishes his death on the unshakable words of Scripture

Luke 24:44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

4. But without his direct work on their minds, they would never comprehend it

Luke 24:45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

- a. This is vital... our minds are closed, darkened, hardened by sin and by corruption
- b. We are obtuse, blinded, unable to comprehend the Word

- c. God through Christ by his Holy Spirit has power to enlighten the mind to understand the Scripture... and without this direct activity, we will never understand

C. The Atonement Rooted in Scripture

Luke 24:46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day

1. This was not some newly hatched scheme, hastily thrown together
2. Christ's substitutionary sufferings for our sins was God's eternal plan from before the foundation of the world
3. And, little by little, he predicted it in Scripture

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel

The animal sacrificial system... by which animals die and their blood is poured out to save sinners from the just wrath of God

So also the clear prediction of the death of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53:

4. These and many other scriptures Christ must have shared with his disciples there in the Upper Room
5. The suffering of Christ was established in the mind of God before the foundation of the world
6. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the centerpiece of the Great Commission... and it is infinite, immeasurable

D. But Now... the Redemption which has been accomplished must be APPLIED

1. There was plainly a two-step process that dreadful night of the Passover
2. The lamb had to be slaughtered, its blood poured out

3. THEN that blood had to be applied... PAINTED with a bushy branch of hyssop on the doorposts and lintels
4. In the same way, the sufferings of Christ and his blood poured out are just the first step... now that blood has to be applied to sinners all over the world
5. The application of the blood is by the ministry of the WORD... a message proclaimed which must be believed... Great Commission

II. The Great Commission Stated Plainly

Luke 24:46-48 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

- A. Christ Has Entrusted to His Disciples the Proclamation of the Gospel
 1. Look carefully at the words
 2. "Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached IN HIS NAME TO ALL NATIONS"
 3. There is one Savior, one Redeemer... the Christ whose blood alone atones for sin
 4. But the message of this salvation has to be taken to the distant parts of the earth; and it has to be heard, and believed
 5. Jesus then says YOU ARE WITNESSES OF THESE THINGS
 - a. "Witnesses" = people who speak about what they have seen and heard
 - b. The eyewitness account of the facts of Jesus' physical life on earth... his birth by his mother, Mary... she was there in the Upper Room; his growth from childhood; his public ministry which began when he was about thirty years old; his temptation in the desert, and his sinlessness; his miracles—a river of healings and other signs and wonders which proved his deity; his amazing teachings; his holy manner of life; his compassion on suffering sinners; his powerful enemies, their unreasoning

hatred of him; his arrest by the Jews, his condemnation by the Romans; his crucifixion; his physical death; and now, amazingly, on the third day, his bodily resurrection from the dead

c. YOU ARE WITNESSES OF THESE THINGS

B. This Great Commission was WRITTEN in the Old Testament

1. Jesus includes this under the words "This is what is written"
2. The spread of the gospel, beginning from Jerusalem out to the ends of the earth was PREDICTED in the prophets
 - a. From the original call of Abraham

Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

- b. To the universal vision of the Psalms

Psalms 2:8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.

- c. To the amazing visions of Isaiah the prophet

Isaiah 66:19 "I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations-- to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians (famous as archers), to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations.

3. Christ Entrusted This Great Commission to the Church
 - a. Only as the gospel is proclaimed to the ends of the earth and in the distant island and coastlands can sinners be saved

C. BUT the Power of the Holy Spirit was Essential to this Great Commission

Luke 24:48-49 You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

1. Until the Holy Spirit came, the church had no power to spread the gospel
2. They themselves were still terrorized by fear of the Jews, locked in the Upper Room
3. And the people they would preach to would never believe this message apart from the direct work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts

Acts 1:8 you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

III. The Subsequent Sacrifices of the Great Commission

A. Since that Time, the Gospel Has Made Amazing Progress

Jesus was a prophet... and a prophet's ministry can only be established if the predictions he makes COME TRUE

This is one of the most astonishing fulfillments of any prophecy ever spoken!

When Jesus gave this Great Commission in the Upper Room, there were only 120 believers... they were all Jews who had never been beyond Palestine; the most overpowering reality in the world was the Roman Empire, not the Kingdom of a Jewish carpenter

Now, almost twenty centuries later, there is no political nation on earth where there are no Christians;

The worldwide movement of Jesus Christ numbers in the hundreds of millions... his name is by far the greatest, most famous name on planet Earth in every generation

And Isaiah's prediction that the distant islands would hear of his fame and see his glory has come true as well

the most distant islands from Jerusalem is the Pitcairn Islands... 11,305 miles away from the Holy City! These distant islands

have an amazing Christian heritage from the story of the Mutiny on the Bounty – In 1789, mutineers on the HMS Bounty led by Fletcher Christian overthrew the tyrannical Captain Bligh and put him in a small rowboat; knowing they would be hunted relentlessly by the British Admiralty, they fled in the ship – the Bounty; they ended up in a tiny uncharted island which they named Pitcairn Island... it is 1435 miles southwest of Tahiti. When they landed, the mutineers fought with each other and with the native men and women they had brought with them until all of the adults were dead except two men, Edward Young and John Adams. Ashamed of their sins, they began reading the Bible and committed themselves and their children to the Christian faith.

A New England whaler came upon this uncharted island in 1807 and went ashore to get fresh water. He was astonished to find a community of people who spoke English and lived in a strong and committed piety according to the teachings of Scripture and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But Christ did not come to save uninhabited islands. The most distant populated islands from Jerusalem is New Zealand... 10,192 miles from Jerusalem. The gospel first came there by a Dutch explorer named Abel Tasman in 1642, who named the new island Tasmania. It was populated by the Maori people. Though Tasman did not linger there or work as a missionary, he prayed "May God Almighty vouchsafe his blessing on this work." English explorer James Cook sailed there 120 years later and also prayed for the land.

It wasn't until 1814 that the missionary movement came to New Zealand... as the Rev. Samuel Marsden made seven voyages to that land from 1814-1837 and led many Maori people to faith in Christ. The Maori had been violent and had killed and even eaten other Englishmen who had tried to connect with them. But Marsden gained their respect and through his powerful personality and tireless efforts planted a strong Christian movement among the Maori.

B. Every Generation, the Church Has Advanced the Gospel at VERY HIGH COST

1. It has been a trail of blood

Colossians 1:24-25 *Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. ²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness*

2. Christ's servants have to FILL UP IN THEIR FLESH what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the church
 - a. "what is lacking?" Seems blasphemous
 - b. Until you consider the two steps... redemption ACCOMPLISHED, then APPLIED
 - c. Christ's sufferings on the cross = redemption accomplished
 - d. Christ's sufferings through his servants = redemption applied
3. The early church was Jewish suffered great persecutions from unbelieving Jewish authorities
4. Then the church spread out throughout the Roman Empire and the Romans viciously persecuted Christians... famously spilling their blood in the sands of the Coliseum
5. Eventually the gospel spiritually conquered the Roman Empire, shown by Constantine's conversion to Christianity in AD 312
6. Christian missionaries took the gospel to the terrifying barbarian tribes of Germania and Brittain and suffered terribly persecutions before winning many of them to Christ
7. In every generation, Christ's servants have realized that the gospel cannot spread without sacrifice

John 12:24 *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

C. Stories of Missionary Sacrifice

1. James Gilmour (1843-1891), Scottish missionary to the Mongols
 - a. Vast, rugged terrain, 1.3 million square miles... about the same size as the American West
 - b. Once under Genghis Khan the Mongols ruled the largest empire the world had ever seen
 - c. But by the 19th century, the Mongols were impoverished and weak
 - d. James Gilmour went into Mongolia again and again, mostly travelling by foot... averaging over 40 miles per day in his hikes
 - e. He was constantly exposed to the bitter cold of a land where the temperature plummets to as low as 40 degrees below zero in the winter
 - f. He endured long spells of hunger and thirst on his treks; his target people, the Mongols, dwelled in wretchedly filthy, vermin-infested tents
 - g. In those tents, he would seek to win the people from their Buddhism and animism and ancestor worship to faith in Christ; he told simple clear stories of Christ's life, miracles, and teachings
 - h. He possessed rudimentary medical skills and used them to heal sick and injured Mongols
 - i. The people were raucous, drunken, constantly in debt, and they tried his patience
 - j. After four years of diligent sacrificial labor in 1874, he could not count a single convert, or even one person interested in Christianity; none of them seemed to have any sense of need
 - k. Gilmour was very concerned that no Mongol that he talked to

“would be justified in pitching into us for not pitching into them more savagely, for not, in fact, taking them by the cuff of the neck and dragging them into the kingdom.”

In 1884, Gilmour went back to Mongolia, and finally won his first convert:

He was in a dirty Mongolian tent, speaking with a Buddhist lama about Christ when another Mongolian man came in. This man annoyingly stirred the low smoldering fire in the center of the tent, causing profuse smoke to fill the tent so dense Gilmour could not see the man. But then the man spoke, saying “I have for months been a learner of Jesus Christ, and now I am ready to trust him.” Gilmour said of that moment: “The place was beautiful to me as the gate of heaven, and the words of the confession of Christ from out the cloud of smoke were as inspiring to me as if they had been spoken by an angel from out the cloud of glory.”

He walked with this new convert for 23 miles the next day, talking of Christian doctrine. Then the two of them knelt and prayed together, and they separated.

Gilmour continued to travel in native fashion, walking everywhere, eating porridge, living on about six cents per day. During one eight months’ long preaching campaign, he saw about 6000 patients, preached to 24,000 people, sold 3000 Christian books, distributed 4500 tracts, traveled 1860 miles, spent about \$200... and reported that in all of that, only TWO INDIVIDUALS professed faith in Christ.

Gilmour was terribly lonely in this ministry and yearned for a partner... finally the Missionary Society sent him one, and when he came in 1889, he at once sent Gilmour home on furlough... Gilmour was so thin of body and the marks of his sufferings were so plain on his face that when he arrived home in England, his friends did not recognize him.

I think about the level of sacrifice and suffering James Gilmour went through for (as far as I can tell) THREE CONVERTS.

Hebrews 11:37-38 They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- ³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

IV. The Heavenly Celebrations Awaiting These Sacrifices

A. In heaven, we will hear the stories

1. The stories of missionary heroes and heroines who sacrificed greatly to advance the gospel

B. Paul Says "I Rejoice in What Was Suffered for You..."

1. He was speaking of Colossian Christians, whom Paul had NOT led to Christ
2. But he rejoiced in the sacrifices made by those who preached the gospel to them

C. Look at the Final Scene

Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

D. And the Question

Revelation 7:13 "These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?"

E. In Heaven, the stories will be told... and the sacrifices made to bring them the gospel will SHINE LIKE THE SUN FOREVER!!

F. Who Will We Meet?

1. A Japanese convert named Niijima Shimeta, (Joseph Hardy Neesima) who escaped from Japanese authorities in 1864 in the bottom of a wooden ship when it was illegal for Japanese people to leave Japan; he had come to faith in Christ, and wanted to live for

Christ; he eventually was trained theologically, and came back to Japan to open a Christian school for boys, leading many of them to Christ

2. George Leslie Mackay, Canadian Presbyterian missionary from Canada, who worked for decades in Formosa (now known as Taiwan) at the end of the 19th century; his work focused among the headhunters of the mountainous regions; he sat with these people who fastened the heads of their victims as trophies on the walls of their dwellings; he sang simple songs of the gospel to these murderous people; he had one medical skill... extracting rotten teeth; and people came from all over the village to have their painful teeth removed and to hear of Christ
3. Nancy Judson, wife of Adoniram Judson, who when Adoniram was imprisoned, went every day to beg for his freedom... persistently and respectfully seeking to ease his sufferings
4. Men and women who laid down their lives for the Savior... and how sacrifices were rewarded in future generations with thousands of people who trusted in Christ

V. A Call for You to Sacrifice for the Great Commission

A. Pray

1. We have several church members who are serving our Lord overseas
2. Find out who they are and pray for them daily!!
3. Allow your heart to be wrapped up in their daily struggles and successes
4. Hebrews says we should care for those in prison as if we were their fellow prisoners... so also in prayer for missionaries
5. Think what it's like to be alone in a distant land for the holidays... holidays none of your neighbors share
6. Think what it's like for your parents to never see their grandchildren's special moments

7. Think what it's like to get sick regularly with bad food or exposure to illnesses you would never face in America
8. Think what it's like to make many sacrifices, but see so little return on the investment
9. Pray for the seeds they are planting to bear eternal fruit

B. Give

1. Lottie Moon goal: \$150,000
2. We have made our goal almost every year that I have been here
3. This year, with our church having made this MTAB commitment will be our biggest challenge... but I do believe if we understand "sacrifice"... a COSTLY gift... we can do it

C. Go

1. Look for opportunities to go on short-term mission trips
2. Ask God if he may be working in you to be a career missionary... Kevin and Megan Howson left a lucrative life (Kevin had an MBA from Duke University and a high-paying job as a business consultant); they left it to do business as mission in Morocco
3. What might God be calling you to do??