

The Stuff Inside

Luke 6:20-31

Introduction

Sometimes when I am crafting a sermon, I find myself frustrated. I know what I want to say. I know the truth I want to communicate. But finding the right words is often difficult.

For example on this All Saints' Day I was captured by the way the Gospel reading portrays the differences between the person who knows and experiences the blessing of God and those who do not.

This passage may be somewhat familiar to you. If I had read it from the Gospel of Matthew you would have quickly said "Oh, that's the Beatitudes!"

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

And so on. Nine statements in all, they are a part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Luke's Gospel records some of the same blessings but adds a section of "woes" to the list. Blessed are these people, but woe to these other people. The message is clear:

Some people get blessing. Some people get woe.

And when you read the list Luke provides, you notice there is something qualitatively different about the person who is blessed.

- They love their enemies.
- They pray for those who abuse them.
- They turn the other cheek.

Talking about the same people, the first reading in Daniel refers to them as:

... the holy people of the Most High ... (Daniel 7:18)

It would be easy to spot these people if they had actual haloes on their heads, wouldn't it? But for the most part, they look like ordinary people. What makes them different is what's on the inside.

In my search for the best way to communicate that truth I came across the lyrics of a song by Dallas Wayne. He is a country artist, living in Nashville and has a popular on program on SiriusXM radio. Listen to these lyrics:

He said "I'm not gonna lie to you as he looked me in the eye.
But I'm about two dollars short till I can buy some wine.
I said "This cheap stuff's gonna be the death of you" as I handed him a five.
He said "Sometimes the price that you gotta pay just ain't worth the stayin' alive

Chorus:

The bottle won't kill you. It's the stuff inside.
It's the same with fools like us until the day we die.
Unspoken words, broken dreams, anger and foolish pride.
No the bottle won't kill you. It's the stuff inside.

In the song, that stuff inside is alcohol. This text draws a comparison to stuff on the inside of our lives. That stuff can be stuff that is blessed or the stuff that earns a woe. But it all comes down to the stuff inside.

We want the stuff that results in a blessing, right? No woes for this joe! Here's what I see in the text about the blessing stuff.

#1: THE STUFF INSIDE IS ELUSIVE, NOT EASY

In the three verses preceding the Gospel reading, we learn:

A great multitude was there from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear (Jesus) and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured... (Luke 6:17-18)

Like this great multitude, the outside stuff -- the issues of our lives -- occupy our thoughts and our minds. We go to Jesus when there is a problem to solve, a big prayer request to pray, when the demons that surround us become overwhelming. And He invites us to bring all of that to Him.

- Jesus never tells us to stop coming in those times.
- He is patient far longer than anyone else would ever be!

Take all that to Jesus. Never hesitate to take all of that to Jesus. But know that these things are distractions to the life God desires for you. It is things such as these that make the inner stuff elusive.

In our Sunday School lesson a week ago, the teacher referenced the story of Mary and Martha. The story is in Luke 10:

Mary ... sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. (Luke 10:39-40)

When Martha complained, Jesus reminded her that there was something more important going on than those distractions:

You are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. (Luke 10:41-42)

It is hard for me to think about the blessing stuff on the inside when the outside stuff is full of painful junk. That stuff on the inside is elusive because it doesn't take much for us to start thinking about something else. And distractions abound.

- I do my devotions first thing in the morning because if I don't the distractions will come. Spending time with God is elusive.

#2: THE STUFF ON THE INSIDE IS ETERNAL, NOT TEMPORARY

One day a man of great importance came to talk with Jesus. The Bible calls him "the rich young ruler." This man had achieved a lot in his few years.

- His income level and assets earned him the adjective "rich."
- His work ethic had given him the title "ruler."
- "Young" was a matter of luck. T
- he only description missing was "good-looking." He probably had that too. I'm going to give him credit for it.

This rich young good-looking ruler had everything going for him, but he recognized that it was all temporary. That recognition compelled him to visit Jesus with the all-important question:

"Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17)

He had all the temporary stuff: wealth, youth, power, good looks. But he knew there was something more. Something eternal.

- It was as if he was saying, "I know how to get all the temporary stuff, but I don't know how to get the eternal."
- I don't know how to get the stuff inside me that results in the blessing of God
- I don't know how to gain that stuff inside that allows me to do such bizarre things as love my enemies, pray for those who persecute me, go the extra mile, turn the other cheek.
- Woe I know. Blessings I don't.

Some people pursue the woe stuff their whole lives, thinking it will result in a feeling of blessing. Rich. Young. Good looking. In charge. And like this guy in the Bible story, they get it, only to find out it isn't blessing after all.

A certain tribe in Africa selects a new king every seven years. For seven years that king gets to enjoy all the high honors known to life in the tribe.

- During these seven years his authority is absolute, even to the power of life and death.
- For seven years he rules, is honored and given many possessions. But when his seven years are up, the tribe members kill him. That is the ultimate definition of "term limits."
- It is a custom that is hundreds of years old, so the king knew going in that his kingship would be temporary.

- But even with that knowledge, the tribe always has people vying for that post. Their goal is riches and power. Even if it is only temporary. It sounds great in year 1, but I have to think in year 6 you would start to question your decision.

God's blessing only comes in those things that are eternal.

#3: THE INNER IS ESSENTIAL, NOT OPTIONAL

All of this brings us to this final conclusion:

When the end comes, nothing else matters.

The Apostle Paul was like that rich young good-looking ruler. Prior to his encounter with Jesus on the Road to Damascus, he had spent his life pursuing the wrong kind of stuff. And he got everything he ever wanted:

If anyone tries to throw around their pedigrees to you, remember my résumé. It is more impressive than theirs. I was circumcised on the eighth day—as the law prescribes—born of the nation of Israel, descended from the tribe of Benjamin. I am a Hebrew born of Hebrews; I have observed the law according to the strict piety of the Pharisees, separate from those embracing a less rigorous kind of Judaism. Zealous? Yes. I ruthlessly pursued and persecuted the church. And when it comes to the righteousness required by the law, my record is spotless. (Philippians 3:4-6, The Voice)

But then he encountered Jesus. And in so doing he recognized that all of that stuff was optional stuff. None of it was essential. In fact, here is how he reported it:

But whatever I used to count as my greatest accomplishments, I've written them off as a loss because of Jesus. I now realize that all I gained and thought was important was nothing but yesterday's garbage ... (Philippians 3:7-8, The Voice)

That realization made all the difference. In that moment when Paul met Jesus, the stuff inside of him changed from woe to blessing. Isn't interesting that when he was caught up in the pursuit of the resume, he didn't see any of it as a problem. But once he met Jesus, he saw it differently.

He became, in the words of another passage he wrote, a new creation:

Therefore, if anyone is united with the Anointed One, that person is a new creation. The old life is gone—and see—a new life has begun! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

APPLICATION

King Solomon, the wisest man on earth, was profound when he said:

Before every person lies a road that seems to be right but the end of that road is death and destruction. (Proverbs 14:12, The Voice)

And if that were the only choice before us, life would be most miserable indeed. We would have no need for an All Saints' Day. It would all be "woe." "Death and destruction."

But there is another road.

There are two paths before you; you may take only one path. One doorway is narrow. And one door is wide. Go through the narrow door. For the wide door leads to a wide path, and the wide path is broad; the wide, broad path is easy, and the wide, broad, easy path has many, many people on it; but the wide, broad, easy, crowded path leads to death. Now then that narrow door leads to a narrow road that in turn leads to life. It is hard to find that road. Not many people manage it. (Matthew 7:13-14, The Voice)

That narrow road is Jesus. It is the way of blessing. He tells us:

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

Amen.
(