

Getting to the end of ourselves: Broken to be Whole

In the lesson last week I introduced the idea of getting to the end of ourselves. The reason for doing this is because this is how we experience real blessings & fulfillment in this life.

Luke 9:23-24 Jesus instructed some disciples that we must deny ourselves in order that our lives may be saved. The main focus of our lives must be on spiritual things instead of physical things. We don't want to be like the Jews in **Jn 6** who were essentially eating manna in the wilderness to die. Jesus was teaching them to eat the bread from Heaven to live.

Recognize that this perspective about life is not only countercultural, it is also counterintuitive.

Beginning with the lesson today and for the next 3 to follow we will explore how **Jesus wants to lead us down the path to real life**. He doesn't want us to call Him Lord, Lord and not do what He says (Lk6:46). He wants us to build our lives with Him as the solid foundation because this is the path leading to real blessings & fulfillment. To get to this abundant life we must get to the end of ourselves.

The lesson today will teach us that we must see our own brokenness in order to get to the end of ourselves & become useful to God. I want to illustrate this by telling you about a small community in the country of Paraguay. This community is literally located in a landfill, where more than 1500 tons of trash is dumped every day. The people in this community scratch out a living by going through the trash looking for something that can be recycled and sold.

To us this sounds like a hopeless situation. One that is broken beyond repair. In the midst of this hopeless situation a story of hope was born. It happened when a young musician named Favio Chavez visited and saw the horrible living conditions. Wanting to do something to help, he decided to start a music school. Soon he had several participants, but no musical instruments. He met a trash picker named Nicolas Gomez and he told him to look for anything that could be recycled into an instrument. They made a cello from an oil can and old cooking tools; a flute from tiny cans; a drum set with old x-rays as the skins; a violin from an aluminum salad bowl and strings tuned with forks.

This community is now known for having an amazing children's orchestra. It is called the **Landfill Harmonic** and you can see their story and hear them play on YouTube. This is an incredible story about resourcefulness and resilience. But it parallels an even greater story –the story of the gospel!

Jesus left the throne of God in Heaven for the landfill of earth where our situation was hopeless and broken beyond repair because of sin. God sent His son to mend, repair, and provide hope. Jesus takes what is broken and discarded as rubbish and transforms it into something useful to God.

His peers called him a fool and a blasphemer because His teaching ran against the grain of their ways of thinking. With His teaching He tells us about a new way of life and introduces us to the **great kingdom paradox --- at the end of ourselves, we find real life in Him.**

Let me show you what I mean. Turn with me to **Matt.5:1**

Jesus sees the crowds and goes up the mountain and begins to teach them. I don't want to make too much out of this, but in those days there were men who started insurrections and they were said to have laid low in the mountains to avoid arrest. Well, Jesus was no insurrectionist, but He was a resurrectionist! He came to give life to the dead.

His message was not about an earthly kingdom, but the kingdom of God. And the teaching of this kingdom is quite the opposite of what most people expected. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus teaches things that seem ridiculous at first, but when we begin to think with a spiritual mind it starts to make sense.

His first statement promises the ultimate reward to the least likely people

Matt. 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The word for "poor" that Jesus used translates to destitute or bankrupt.

-Blessed are those who are bankrupt in spirit.

-so broke you have nothing to offer

Jesus is saying that God's kingdom begins in us when we come to the end of ourselves and realize we have nothing to offer.

From a worldly perspective, this is the polar opposite of the type of people we typically want to associate with. Conventional wisdom says to radiate self-confidence and self-sufficiency. The world says we should be rich in spirit.

Jesus says we should take inventory of ourselves and come up with ZERO!

The apostle Paul is a remarkable example of being poor in spirit. Notice the teaching of **Philippians 3**

Vs.3 He says we don't concern ourselves with fleshly things, but we worship God and rejoice in Christ (poor in spirit)

Vs.4-6 I could hang my hat on fleshly things and nobody has a better resume than me. He was once rich in spirit.

Vs.7-8 Fleshly things are of no value in the kingdom of Heaven

Vs.9-11 I come to Christ daily with nothing to offer except my faith in Him to resurrect me from the dead.

Vs.12-14 Even after following Christ for many years I don't act like I've already reached perfection. In fact, I forget about the past and press on for the prize that awaits.

Paul was a living example of what it means to be poor in spirit and he shows us why anyone would want to do so ---to inherit the kingdom of heaven!

There is one other example I want to share with you that shows the difference between being rich in spirit and poor in spirit. It is recorded in Luke 7.

Lk 7:36-50

Simon the Pharisee invites Jesus to his house for a meal. The text seems to indicate that in those times it was customary for the host to welcome a guest by washing his feet, kissing him, & anointing his head with oil.

Simon not only neglected to do these things, he made no effort at all. It seems a bit ironic that a rule following Pharisee would deliberately break the rules. Perhaps this gives us an indication of his opinion about Jesus and of himself.

He is also showing us how things tend to work among the rich in spirit.

- Because of his wealth, he is comfortable
- Because of his power, he is respected, or at least feared
- Because he's at the top, he is arrogant

But then something unusual happens. A woman crashed the party and things get awkward in a hurry.

Lk.7:37

Luke describes her as a sinner & the general consensus suggests that she was a prostitute. If you've ever been in a situation where you felt totally out of place & unwelcome, then you know how this woman felt.

Picture the scene. She walks in uninvited and goes directly up to Jesus. Simon and the other guests are looking at her with disgust.

- What is she doing here?
- Doesn't she know she doesn't belong here?

But she is undeterred. She begins to cry and notices that Jesus' feet haven't been washed. She can't ask Simon for a bowl of water, so she uses the tears from her eyes to wash the feet of Jesus.

She doesn't have a towel and again, she can't ask Simon for a towel. So she lets her hair down and uses her hair to dry the feet of Jesus. Don't miss the significance of this. Women in those days always wore their hair up in public. If a woman let her hair down for a man who wasn't her husband, it was considered an act of indecency and grounds for divorce.

Can you picture the looks from Simon and the other guests.

Then she brings out her perfume. In those days women often wore a small flask of perfume around their necks. For a prostitute, it would be an important part of daily business. A drop at a time, for a man at a time.

For the feet of Jesus one drop would have sufficed, but she empties the flask. Perhaps she thinks that she will not need it any longer. Perhaps her willingness to offer all that she has is an indication that **she is ready to change all that she is.**

Vs.39 Notice that Simon is disgusted with the whole situation.

From all outward appearances Simon was considered a righteous man and this woman was considered wicked. But Jesus revealed the truth of the matter. He rebuked Simon and blessed the woman (**vs.44-50**).

With these words Jesus has fulfilled the beatitude “Blessed are the poor in spirit”. He has blessed the poorest spirit imaginable and rebuked the richest, most arrogant spirit.

Personal application time.

Which person in the story do you want to be like? If you had to choose, would you be more like the well-respected religious leader who seems to have everything together, the guy everyone looks up to? The guy who lives in a nice home and has other well-to-do people for dinner?

Or would you rather be the broken prostitute who embarrasses herself but experiences the love and grace of Jesus?

In reality most of us want to be both. Here is what I mean by that. We want to be made whole without having to be broken. We’d like to be Simon at the end of the story and say, “Oh, I get it Jesus. Good lesson. From now on I’ll be more considerate of other people and I won’t be so quick to look down on others.

The only problem with that strategy is that it doesn’t demonstrate being poor in spirit. It doesn’t allow us to recognize our own brokenness.

In Luke 7, it’s so obvious that the woman is broken that a blind man could see it!

But what about Simon? This is a guy who spent the first twelve years of his life memorizing the first twelve books of the Bible. By the age of fifteen, he has memorized the entire Old Testament. That means he can recite 300 prophecies

about the coming Messiah. At the moment he's looking across the table at the Messiah and treating Him like an unwanted dinner guest.

Simon is broken too, but he doesn't see it. The broken woman in the story knows goodness and perfection when she sees it; but he doesn't, and he doesn't even know that he doesn't.

Can you see your brokenness? **Rom.2:9-12** "...there is none righteous..."

Can you admit that you are bankrupt and have nothing to offer to redeem you from sin? This is what it means to be poor in spirit.

The paradox is that brokenness is the way to wholeness.

The good news is that God makes the broken whole. He takes the overlooked, the undervalued, the left out, the written off, the damaged & destroyed, and makes them beautiful as only He can do.

In Japan in the 1500's a ceramic restoration process called Kintsugi was developed. They take broken ceramic pieces and join them together, but instead of hiding the cracks, the cracks are boldly highlighted and traced over with gold.

Normally anything that was broken and pieced back together sells at a discount, but not Kintsugi pottery. It often turns out to be more beautiful and more valuable than before it was broken.

That sounds a lot like the way things are in the kingdom of God, don't you think. The broken are the most valuable. The reason for this is the redeeming power of God through Jesus Christ. When we finally come to the end of ourselves and give God the broken pieces, He can make us whole.

In **Jeremiah 18**, God describes Himself as a potter who takes marred vessels and re-makes it into something useful.

Isa.53:5 helps us to see our brokenness from the perspective of the cross.

- We are made whole because He was broken

It's only after we've been made whole that we are ready to fulfill our purpose and be used by God.

Are you willing to bring Christ your broken life marred by sin so that He can make you whole again?

Would you allow yourself to be like clay in the potter's hand and come to Jesus to be re-made according to the desires of the potter?