

Stuff

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I) **Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35**

II) **Introduction**

A) **Your Stuff**

- 1) The day will come when all of your stuff will be sitting on the front lawn somewhere with a price tag on it in hopes that someone will buy it at a fraction for what you paid for it. It is a sad legacy to the American dream.

B) **George Carlin – Stuff**

- 1) The late comedian, George Carlin whose wry and often caustic humor would normally have no place in a worship service. However, when talking about “our stuff” he hits the point right on the head. This is an excerpt from his monologue called, “A Place for my stuff.”

(a) All you need in life is a little place for your stuff. That's all your house is: a place to keep your stuff. If you didn't have so much stuff, you wouldn't need a house. You could just walk around all the time. A house is just a pile of stuff with a cover on it. You can see that when you're taking off in an airplane. You look down, you see everybody's got a little pile of stuff. All the little piles of stuff.

(b) And when you leave your house, you gotta lock it up. Wouldn't want somebody to come by and take some of your stuff. They always take the good stuff. They never bother with that junk you're saving. All they want is the shiny stuff. That's what your house is, a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get...more stuff! Sometimes you gotta move, gotta get a bigger house. Why? No room for your stuff anymore.

C) **Our Stuff**

- 1) I think Carlin's observations are pretty accurate. The fact is, the way you think about your stuff is important because God cares about what you think. He knows that the longing for and love of stuff can become a false god. The way you think about your stuff matters because other people are impacted by your generosity or lack of generosity. Especially your kids.
- 2) This morning we are going to look at 3 stories in the Bible about people and their stuff. We are going to see that the pursuit, storage, and love of stuff is not only a problem for today, it is a human problem throughout time.
- 3) My prayer is that we begin to think differently about stuff. I'm not trying to make a transparent attempt to guilt you into giving more in the offering. On the contrary, I believe scripture calls us to a wonderful freedom that only comes when you are generous with your stuff.
- 4) You are invited to be generous no matter what tax bracket you are in. It doesn't matter if you are a senior citizen full of years or a child barely hatched. Nurturing a generous spirit toward God will not only free you from the bondage of stuff it will change the world.

III) Our Stuff

A) 1st Century Church

- 1) If you have your Bibles pull them out. The first story is about how people dealt with stuff when the church first began shortly after Jesus' resurrection. I'm titling this story from Acts 2:42-47, "Our Stuff." You'll see why in a minute.

B) Acts 2:42-47

- 1) ⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵Selling their "stuff" (possessions and goods), they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.
- 2) The first century church in Jerusalem went through a radical reformation about their attitudes about stuff. At first, the church was small. People pooled their resources together in order to care for each other and move the ministry forward. You get the impression in scripture that everyone gave what they had out of joy. Their giving was an act of worship to God.
- 3) It was in their unity of heart and generosity of giving that the apostles were able to speak with boldness about the resurrection of Jesus to a world that was skeptical, resistant and combative to their cause. Yet, the Lord added to their numbers every day.
- 4) As the ministry needs grew, people responded by giving. They were not coerced, arm twisted, or forced in any way to give. They saw the need and responded. The people's attitude about stuff had changed from "my stuff" and "your stuff" to "our stuff."
- 5) Part of the freedom that comes with nurturing a generous spirit is that everyone is blessed when they joyfully give and no longer look at stuff as "their stuff" but rather, as "our stuff." The result is that no one is left in need.
- 6) The other result is when we think the right way about stuff, the ministry of the gospel to which we have been called is blessed and the world is changed!
- 7) The second story from Acts 4 is kind of a continuation of the first story but it focuses on one person in particular so therefore, I'm titling it, "The Right Stuff."

IV) The Right Stuff: Barnabas

A) Joseph

- 1) ³²All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. ³³With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. ³⁴There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. ³⁶Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), ³⁷sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.
- 2) Here we are introduced to one of the Jews whose parents had fled to the Island of Cypress during the Diaspora but then eventually returned to Jerusalem. His name was Joseph. He was from the tribe of Levy. Historically, Levites were not allowed to own land but that had changed hundreds of years before.
- 3) For a Jew to sell off his family land was unthinkable. But for people like Joseph, who had a generous spirit, he gave his best to God and in so doing he was a great encouragement to the church of Jesus.
- 4) The apostles gave Joseph a new name in keeping with his character. They called him Barnabas which means, "Son of Encouragement."

B) Son of Encouragement

- 1) Ancient tradition says that Barnabas was one of the 70 disciples that Jesus sent out to the villages as an evangelist.
- 2) He was described as a good man, full of faith.
- 3) The next time we see him in scripture after he gave the proceeds of his land to the apostles, he brought Paul, the former persecutor of the church, to Jerusalem. This was about 3 years after Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. There is some speculation that Paul and Barnabas were both students under the famous Rabbi, Gamaliel.
 - (a) *Barnabas introduced Paul and stood by him while I'm sure some skeptical church leaders looked for any deception in the one they knew as a monster. If Barnabas had **not** been there as an advocate for Paul, who knows if the church leaders would have accepted Paul's testimony as authentic. Through Barnabas' encouragement and support, Paul was accepted as a brother.*
- 4) Through the mentorship and encouragement of Barnabas, Paul matured into one of the most important and influential people in the church.
- 5) Through Barnabas' mentorship and encouragement, his nephew John Mark also matured into one of the most important people in the church. Mark wrote the first narrative Gospel of Jesus we know as the Gospel of Mark.

- 6) Because of Barnabas' sacrifice of time, talent and money, he changed the world. His legacy of generosity demonstrated that he had the right stuff when it came to thinking about his stuff.

c) Love God, not stuff

- 1) Pastor and author, John Piper said it well,
 - (a) *"There are two effects of trusting in Jesus: first, the heart is tightened in its relationship to people, and second, the heart is loosened in its relationship to things. Faith in Christ creates a bond of love to people, and cuts the bond of love to things."*
- 2) Author John Sloan in his book, The Barnabas Way put it this way,
 - (a) *"Barnabas demonstrated that if we can give stuff away easily, then our stuff doesn't own us. And we have our hands free to receive what is more important than money."*
- 3) Barnabas demonstrated that his stuff did not own him. He was not simply giving 10% of his income. Barnabas clearly understood that everything belonged to God – his money, his time, his reputation, his successes, his failures, his future and his legacy. He gave them all freely to God as an act of worship.

v) The Wrong Stuff:

A) Ananias and Sapphira

- 1) The third story is set up against the the authentic generosity and encouragement of Barnabas. In this story we are introduced to a married couple named Ananias and Sapphira in chapter 5 of Acts.

B) Acts 5:1-11

- 1) ¹Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ²With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. ³Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?"
- 2) ⁴Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." ⁵When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.
- 3) ⁷About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." ⁹Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

- 4) ¹⁰At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

c) Outward appearance

- 1) On the outside, this husband and wife did what appeared to be a good thing. Like Barnabas, they sold their ancestral land and gave the money, or at least part of the money to the apostles to distribute according to the needs of the Christian community. There was a big difference, however from the character of their heart and the heart of Barnabas.
(a) Frankly, this story should put the fear of God in us because it sure did in the church at that time.
- 2) Long story short, both Ananias and Sapphira lied to God when they told the apostles that they had given the full price of the sale of the land when, in fact, they kept some of it for themselves.
- 3) Peter reminded them that they were not coerced, arm twisted or forced in any way to sell the land or give any of the money.
*(a) **The outward appearance of faith and generosity to God is not a substitute for real faith and generosity.***
- 4) Because they lied, God brought clear and immediate judgment on Ananias. He dropped dead right there on the spot and when Sapphira came a little later and gave the same story she too dropped dead.
(a) Perhaps for the first time in the history of the church the people realized how serious their attitude and integrity in giving to God was.

D) Call to obedience

- 1) We worship a generous and forgiving God. *“For God so loved the world that he gave...”* So we dare not take the seriousness of our giving for granted.
- 2) Let our intentions and our actions be like Barnabas and not Ananias. Barnabas did not love his stuff. He recognized that everything he had was a gift from God entrusted to him for the glory of God and furthering of God’s kingdom.
- 3) Who knows if Barnabas ever knew the impact that his sacrifice of money, talent and time had for the future of the church. He did not give so that people would pat him on the back. Rather, by faith he gave generously to God trusting that some how, some way his legacy would impact the world.
(a) In scripture Barnabas faded off into the distance but his generosity cannot be ignored or forgotten. As the Apostle Paul entered the center stage of the story of the first century church and Mark picked up his pen the legacy of Barnabas is clearly seen. And what a legacy it is.

VI) Conclusion

A) Legacy of giving

- 1) How do you want to be remembered? What will be your legacy?
 - (a) *Will you be remembered as someone who ended up with lots of really nice stuff that was eventually sold at a garage sale?*
 - (b) *Or will you be remembered as someone who left a legacy of generosity? Someone who, like the people in the first century church, gladly shared whatever they had so that no one was in need and the ministry could move forward? And someone who willingly sacrificed their own time and agenda to mentor someone with promise and potential.*
- 2) The way you think about your stuff makes a difference. You teach your children and grandchildren negatively by your love of money and anxiety about not having enough.
- 3) But your attitudes toward generous living teaches your kids and grand kids to live generously, you know. There is no better or more powerful legacy to leave to your children, grandchildren, great grandchildren or great, great, great, grandchildren than a legacy of generosity.
- 4) If you are feeling convicted this morning, as I am, that there is a problem with your attitude about your stuff then together we need to repent.
- 5) May we leave a legacy of generosity to our children and grandchildren. And like the legacy of Barnabas, may future generations be blessed and the world see Jesus.

VII) Media: Generations (5 minutes)

VIII) Prayer

- 1) Lord Jesus, the giving of our money is an act of worship. Help us to give with pure motives and clear conscience withholding nothing for selfish reasons. Forgive us when we have sinned with wrong priorities about our stuff and not given you our first fruits. Build in us as a church the kind of character seen in Barnabas that always encourages with a generous spirit and recognizes the God spark in people. Let us be unified not by money but by your Holy Spirit. Let our giving then be in obedience to your word and in the joy of your many blessings that you give us. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

IX) Benediction

- 1) May the Spirit of God move in you to transform, inform and conform you to be generous. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.