

A Sermon
Rev. W. Kevin Holder
Grace Baptist Church
Bryans Road, Maryland
January 7, 2018

A Heart Full of Goodness

Luke 6:39-49

In the reality television series *Storage Wars*, professional buyers visit storage facilities throughout the state of California and bid on the contents of the lockers. Before each locker is auctioned, the buyers are given five minutes to inspect the contents from the doorway. They can't actually enter the locker or touch any of the items until the auctions are complete. This means that a buyer has to have a good eye and bold instincts to estimate the value of the goods.

After the day's auctions are complete, the winning bidders get to sort through the lockers, estimating the prices they'll set on the contents if they want to put items up for resale. In the case of an unusual item, they might consult an expert for appraisal. On the screen are running totals that display the cost versus estimated total value. Then at the end of the episode, there's a final tally of the buyer's net profit or loss.

During the show's first season, a new member named Jarrod, who had lost several auctions to the veteran bidders, vowed to win the next unit up for bid. A visual scan of the unit revealed some cardboard boxes, newspapers, and old bottles, as well as a large combination safe in the middle of the floor. Imagining that the safe might be filled with gems, gold bars, bearer bonds, land deeds, or other riches, Jarrod made a hefty bid of \$1,500. After paying and entering the unit, he was disappointed to discover that the safe was completely empty. So it looked like Jarrod's hopes were dashed, until another bidder informed him that the safe itself was highly collectible. Jarrod eventually sold it for \$3,000.¹ You never know what might be revealed when the door of one's storage space gets opened. Jewels. Junk. Or maybe an unexpected jewel in the midst of junk.

Alison Stewart, a former reporter and news anchor, wrote a book titled *Junk: Digging Through America's Love Affair With Stuff*, in which she examined both the private lives and the profitable businesses associated with our craving for consumer goods. In addition to highlighting how billions of square feet of storage space generate billions of dollars in revenue every year, she also pointed out: "The real tension that exists between the desire to buy and own, positioned against the stress created by the acquisitions, makes perfect sense for nonscripted television." Thus the multiplication of reality television shows, with names like *American Pickers*, *Auction Hunters*, *Auction Kings*, *Buried Treasure*, *Flea Market Flip*, *Hoarders*, *Junk Gypsies*, *Junkyard Wars*, *Pawn Stars*, *Picker Sisters*, *Storage Wars*, and its spinoff *Storage Wars Texas*.²

Some of you may rent storage space, or at least have space in your home devoted to storage. Or maybe some of the square footage in your house that's supposed to be living space is actually starting to look more like the set of a reality television show. Part of what you've accumulated may be treasure, and part may be trash, with plenty of stuff that falls somewhere in between. That's where the sorting and decision-making get even harder. Keep or toss.

In today's Scripture passage from Luke, Jesus uses the realities of storage to give us instruction about what it means to be his disciples. Our text is part of a larger block of teaching material often called the Sermon on the Plain, since Luke locates Jesus on a level place. In Matthew's Gospel, it happens on a mountain. In both versions, Jesus covers a wide range of subjects, including integrity and purity of heart. So in verse 45 of today's passage, Jesus says, "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks" (v. 45).

The Greek word translated here as "stored up" is *thesaurus*. In other translations, it's often rendered as "treasure." It refers to the place or space where things are collected and laid up. This could be a storage room or a chamber or perhaps a chest. Whatever type of space it is, the main thing is that this is where human beings place things that are regarded as especially precious. If it's valuable, you store it away.

According to Jesus, if you want to be one of his disciples, and live a kingdom of God kind of life, then you need to see yourself as a storehouse. More specifically, you need to view your heart as sacred space where lots of things get stored up. When I speak of your "heart," I'm talking about the center of who you are. Your heart is the core that embraces your thoughts, your affections, and your will. Your heart is what constitutes your essential self. So it's no wonder that Jesus stresses the importance of what goes into your heart.

Now it's true that your heart can be shaped by factors like your genetic inheritance, your basic personality, or your unique gifts or insights. But your heart is also deeply formed by what enters it from the outside. As one person has put it, "Certainly from childhood on, a torrential amount of content is poured into the reservoir of the heart from seemingly unlimited sources of varying quality, some of it pure, some of it polluted."³ In our text, as Jesus forms the community of his followers, he himself recognizes the shaping power of things that are pure and things that are polluted. Our Lord speaks of how we are capable of storing up good things and evil things.

It's not as if Jesus goes around summoning only people who are impervious to the power and corrupting influence of sin. There are no such people. Instead, there are only people like us, whose hearts can be molded by both good things and evil things. Russian writer Alexandr Solzhenitsyn said, "If only there were evil people somewhere, insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"⁴

The heart, your heart and my heart, is the critical space where God has to do his work. That's because life change flows from heart change. In other words, how you live is generated by who you are. During Jesus' life and ministry, there were some religious groups and schools of thought claiming that if you just do the right thing long enough, it becomes a habit, and this eventually leads to being a good person. But Jesus saw things differently. He declared that you can tell a tree by its fruit. Jesus says that doing good is the fruit of being good. And being good is a matter of the heart. So Jesus shifts from talking about trees to talking about treasure. Not the kind of treasure that's safely tucked away in a closet, a plastic bin, a safe deposit box, or perhaps even a rented storage unit, but the kind of treasure that you place into the sacred space called your heart.

Every day, in a multitude of ways, you're engaged in the spiritual work of accumulating. You're storing up thoughts, words, emotions, perceptions, and impressions. You're collecting experiences and events. You're assembling messages and ideas. You're

organizing claims and circumstances. Moment by moment, sometimes in ways you aren't even aware of, you're acquiring things. Things that people say, things that people do, things that you see, things that you read, things that you watch, things that you listen to, things that you buy, things that you eat. According to Jesus, who you are on the inside is influenced by what enters from the outside. This means that being a disciple of Jesus requires God-given discernment, so that from a spiritual standpoint, you know what to keep and what to toss.

Jesus tells us to acquire and hold onto the things that make for a good heart. So be more diligent about filling your heart with goodness than you are about filling your display cabinet with collectibles. Be more focused on accumulating good things in your heart than you are about accumulating interest in your retirement account. Be more careful about organizing good stuff in your heart than you are about organizing those boxes of stuff in your basement. After all, when stacked up against the lasting treasures of God's kingdom, stored away in the heart, many of the things that we count as precious begin to lose a lot of their value.

There's a verse from Proverbs, printed as the Scripture for reflection in today's bulletin. It says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." Your heart, as I stressed earlier, is the locus of your will, thought, and feeling. It's the "wellspring of life," the essential self from which your actions flow. The content of your actions reveal the content of your heart. Or to pick up on Jesus' own imagery, you can't place one kind of item in storage and then go back later to pull it out, expecting it to be something different. In terms of your heart, what you put in it is what will come out of it.

This is why it's crucial for you to be vigilant about the condition of your heart, and to pay close attention to what you're storing up in it. When it comes to the state of your heart, you need to be collecting and gathering up goodness, in all its forms. You need to pack your heart tight with the truth of God revealed in Jesus. You need to take the riches of the Scriptures, the preciousness of worship, the value of fellowship, and the costliness of Christian living, and stack them up high in the confines of your heart. You need to take friendships and other relationships with people who influence you in the direction of goodness, and lay them up for safekeeping. You need to take the kinds of things that build you up in Christ, the kinds of things that make you more devoted to him, the kinds of things that make you more like him, and absolutely, unashamedly hoard them. Above all, you need to be steadily accumulating the presence of the Holy Spirit, the presence of Christ himself, within the square footage of your heart.

The comedian George Carlin is quoted as saying, "The essence of life is trying to find a place to put all your stuff."⁵ In today's text, Jesus teaches us that the essence of being his disciple is to stay busy storing up the right kind of stuff, in the right place, your heart. When you store up good things, you develop a heart full of goodness. And from that fullness come your words and works, your attitudes and actions. Your life of following Jesus becomes simply the overflow of what you've accumulated in your heart.

¹ Tor Constantino, "Storage Wars: How a Cable Show Resembles the Kingdom of Heaven." IPost website. Accessed January 3, 2018 <<http://ipost.christianpost.com/post/storage-wars-how-a-cable-show-resembles-the-kingdom-of-heaven>>.

² Jerry De Luca, summarizing Alison Stewart, *Junk: Digging Through America's Love Affair With Stuff* (Chicago: Review Press, 2016) <<http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2016/october/7100316.html>>.

³ "The Biblical Conception of the 'Heart.'" Dallas Baptist University. 2001 Summer Institute in Christian Scholarship (July 11, 2001).

⁴ Quoted in Bill Hybels, *Making Life Work: Putting God's Wisdom into Action* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998) 204.

⁵ Jim Auchmutey, "Our Overflowing Lives." *Atlanta Journal Constitution* (January 20, 2002).