

Sermon – January 6, 2019

Grace Street Fellowship, Dr. Jim Burgin, pastor

SERIES: NEW YEAR'S COMPASS #1

RESOLUTION: "*Coming to the end of me*"

Scriptures - Matthew 5:1-3; Luke 7:36-50

"Blessed are the Poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God."

OPENING

"The Opposite" is the 86th episode of the NBC sitcom Seinfeld, which was the 21st episode of the fifth season. It aired on May 19, 1994. Jason Alexander's character, George, remarks to Jerry Seinfeld "every decision he has ever made has been wrong, and that his life is the exact opposite of what it should be. Seinfeld observes slyly that if every instinct he has is wrong, then the opposite would have to be right." So, George experiments with doing the complete opposite of what he would normally do.

George orders the opposite of his normal lunch, and introduces himself to a beautiful woman who happens to order the same lunch, saying, "My name is George. I'm unemployed and I live with my parents." She is impressed and agrees to date him.

INTRODUCTION

1. I want to talk with you today and perhaps over the next few weeks about New Year's resolutions, but I would like to think of them in terms of guidelines, or goals.
2. And, I hope to present you with options which have a multiplying effect – so that if you practice/achieve this goal, it will have ramifications in multiple areas of your life.
3. I suggest that this first goal will seem upside down to you, like you are in some kind of Seinfeld episode as described above, but I believe if you can move towards this core principal, it will impact your live in multiple arenas.
4. Here it is to blossom spiritually, and to find spiritual fulfillment and blessing, you need to come to the end of yourself.
5. I have been moving towards this concept for some time over the last couple of months in our church wide study of the Psalms. Psalm 27:4 says "One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord, and to seek him in his temple.
6. I have seen this also in John the Baptist's declaration, "He must increase; I must decrease."
7. We will be blessed when we come to the end of ourselves.
8. Would you look with me at our text for today, from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount," the first verse of the beatitudes.

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

1. Perhaps you are thinking, "Yes, I win, because I'm completely broke."
2. Then you think, Maybe Jesus misspoke, and he meant to say, "Blessed are the rich." Yes, we see the words "in Spirit," but the fact remains that we think those with resources are the blessed ones.

3. The word that Jesus uses for poor here is the word bankrupt. Bankrupt in Spirit. Really, the word we use is “broke.” Blessed are you when you are so broke you have nothing to offer.
4. Jesus is saying that God’s Kingdom begins in you when you come to the end of yourself and realize you have nothing to offer. It is precisely the opposite of every assumption we tend to make in this world.
5. If you are broke, how do you act? You don’t act like you have the world on a string, do you? Conventional wisdom tells us to radiate self-confidence, self-sufficiency. But Jesus says the kingdom begins when you take inventory and discover that you have nothing to offer. That’s when you are making progress.
6. Where are you this morning? Are you full of yourself? Or, are you at the end of yourself?

AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE POINT

1. An Important Party – Jesus is invited to a dinner party at the home of an important religious leader (Pharisee) named Simon.
2. Parties Like this have protocols
 - a. Kiss of the Hand – Guests were to be greeted with a kiss;
 - b. Foot Washing- a daily reality in a dusty culture that revered cleanliness. Roads weren’t paved, so you washed your feet when you visited a friend. At this kind of dinner, the host was expected to help wash the visitor’s feet. At the very least, guests were offered a bowl of water to wash their own feet;
 - c. Anointing with Oil- An especially hospitable gesture and very fine oil should be used, not the discount stuff from the drugstore.
3. Simon Ignored the Protocols
 - a. I’m not too big on ceremony either. Fancy dinner parties make me nervous, because I never know which fork to use;
 - b. But this isn’t about Simon being uncomfortable with the protocol, or even forgetting. He deliberately chose to put Jesus in his place. He isn’t trying and forgetting. He isn’t trying at all, and everybody would know it.
 - c. Remember, Simon is a religious leader, and in front of all the dignitaries, he’s ignoring the religious rules. Which gives us a clue as to his opinion of Jesus.
 - d. We see here how things work. Simon is wealthy, and therefore comfortable. Because of his power, he is respected, or feared. Because he is at the top of the heap, he’s arrogant. All of us recognize this scenario.
4. An Uninvited Woman Crashes the Party
 - a. Suddenly things are uncomfortable in a completely new way.
 - b. A prostitute shows up at a dinner for the pious.
 - c. Daggers were stared at her from every direction – disgust, outrage, and many looking down. You have to wonder if some of the men there knew her professionally. But all she sees is Jesus.
 - d. In those days, for some reason, chairs weren’t the thing. Guests reclined at tables, which were close to the ground, with one arm on a pillow, and their feet stretched out behind.
 - e. She saw Jesus, and went right to him, and he welcomed her. He didn’t stand up, or push her away. Perhaps he even looked off those rushing to usher her out of the home.

f. What will happen in this scene between “teacher and tramp?”

5. A Woman with Nothing to Lose

- a. She falls to the floor to kiss his feet, and to clean his feet with her tears. The tears become the cleansing water Simon should have supplied;
- b. Now, she needs to dry his feet, but she can’t exactly ask the host for a towel, so she lets down her hair, unthinkable for a respectable woman in the first century and grounds for divorce if a woman did that with anyone who was not her husband.
- c. A dirty woman becomes the embodiment of cleansing.
- d. Then she pulls out the flask of oil which she kept around her neck. One drop would do, but she pours out the whole vial. He was worthy of all she had.
- e. Jesus forgives her sins. Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God.

WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE?

1. Simon had memorized over 300 verses about the coming Messiah, yet he couldn’t see the Messiah in Jesus. He treats the Messiah as an unwanted dinner guest. He is broken, because he doesn’t know he is.
2. The woman is at the end of herself and finds God’s blessing.
3. Which do you want to be? Would you rather be the broken prostitute who embarrasses herself but deeply experiences the love and grace of Jesus? Or the well-respected religious leader who seems to have his stuff together, the person everyone looks up to? The person who lives in a beautiful home and has VIPs over for dinner?
4. This is a trick question, because most of us want both, especially if we’ve been Christians for a while. We want to be made whole without being broken.
5. But it isn’t possible.

A CLARIFYING CONVERSATION WITH CS LEWIS

1. Before we become Christians, we are ordinary people with various desires and interests.
2. When we become Christians, we assume that we will have to give up some of these desires to add others in their place, such as going to church, reading our Bibles, praying, giving, serving, and so on.
3. However, sometimes our unconscious hope is that once the demands of religion have been met, we will still have the chance to get on with our own lives and do as we like. We are like the honest people who pay their taxes, but hope they will have some left over to spend as we please.
4. Listen to this quote from CS Lewis: ““Christ says, ‘Give me All. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don’t want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you myself; my own will shall become yours.””
5. This is far harder, and far easier than you might imagine. Lewis compares it to two students given a problem in mathematics. The lazy boy will memorize the formula, because it is easier for the moment. The other will learn the principle, even though that’s harder at the time. But when the test comes, the lazy student has to work much harder, while the other student understands and enjoys.
6. Spiritually, our challenge is similar. It is far harder to hand over all of ourselves to Jesus, but it is far easier than what we are trying to do instead. We are trying to remain what we call “ourselves,” to keep

our personal happiness as our great aim in life, yet at the same time be good Christians. This is exactly what Jesus said we couldn't do.

7. It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird, but it is even harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg? The problem is that you have to decide. You can't go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. You must be hatched or go bad. Lewis concludes, "This is the whole of Christianity. There is nothing else."
8. You see, I want my Christianity – to be saved and to go to heaven, and I want the good life, and I want to run my life. Let's play a game called "who's the Sinner?"

CONCLUSION

1. One author says it like this: "We are "those people." The truth is . . . we are the others. Most of us are one paycheck, one divorce, one drug-addicted kid, one mental health diagnosis, one serious illness, one sexual assault, one drinking binge, one night of unprotected sex, or one affair away from being "those people" – the ones we don't trust, the ones we pity, the ones we don't let our children play with, the ones bad things happen to, the ones we don't want living next door.
2. We think God is someone more impressed with us, because we make up our own rules and follow them, but we are the people who
 - a. Have gone into deep debt to keep up appearances;
 - b. Look down on others who are different;
 - c. Work fifty-plus hours a week trying to prove our worth
 - d. Have holes punched in our walls and doors unhinged from slamming;
 - e. Spend hours a day on social media trying to convince people that our lives are better than theirs.
 - f. Have become masters of illusion, experts at covering pain, abusers of medication, slaves of financial debt, followers of fads, and partakers of loneliness
 - g. Because we won't realize that, the only solution for being broken is. . . Brokenness.
3. But God makes the broken whole. In the physical world, broken things lose their value. They are thrown away – glassware, dishes, furniture. Flaws are fatal. But in the spiritual world, just the reverse is true. The broken are the most valuable in the Kingdom.

INVITATION

1. You have to come to the end of yourself to accept Christ.
2. You have to pick up your cross daily to be his disciple. Die to yourself daily. Give yourself to him each morning. A colleague this winter challenged me. In a penetratingly cold day, he gave up his inside spot, so that someone else could stay warm. It came naturally to him, but not to me.
3. Do you want to be useful in the Kingdom? Then yield to His will and watch where the Spirit leads you.

