

GOD'S GARBAGE COLLECTORS

Isaiah 53:4-5; Matthew 11:28

Introduction

I don't know why, but our church facilities became a public dump a couple of weeks ago! Maybe people thought we could use their cast-offs for our rummage sale. Or maybe they thought we didn't have to pay for our dumpster. Or maybe they just wanted to find someplace where they could dump their trash without being seen. But in the course of a couple of days, more garbage, trash and junk was left at our church than any other time I've ever seen.

After our rummage sale, I made a trip to Teen Challenge to take all the clothing we didn't sell. Then I came back and loaded up my truck with the other things and took them to the Goodwill. There were a couple of large pieces of furniture that the Goodwill wouldn't take, along with some other things we'd had lying around, that I wound up taking to the dump.

In between going to the Goodwill and the dump, however, someone had dropped off a large, heavy fiberglass sandblasting unit! They just left it sitting in the middle of our driveway! I think it must have weighed 100 pounds, and took up nearly half my truck bed! Fortunately since I was on my way to the dump, I was able to get rid of it.

That all happened on a Tuesday. When I came to the church on Wednesday evening, I couldn't believe what I saw. Our dumpster was literally overflowing with trash, 3 or 4 feet over the top—with a full-size box spring mattress lying on top of it all!

And that wasn't all! All around the dumpster were bags of trash lying on the ground. I guess whoever left them just couldn't quite manage to reach the top of the mountain of trash in the dumpster, so they just tossed them on the ground.

I was so mad and frustrated I could hardly think—much less pray—which is what I'd come to do just before Wednesday evening services. And I let my frustration be known to everyone I saw (I'm sure I was a real *blessing* to those who had come to pray with me!).

But as we began to pray, the Lord worked a miracle! He cleaned up all the trash—all the *trash* that is, that was in my mind and heart that evening! I sensed Him speak to me in my spirit, and He said, "If people can't bring their garbage, trash and junk to My Church, where can they take it?" And I realized He was talking about the same kind of garbage, trash and junk I harbored in my mind and heart while I was praying.

In an instant, I was both rebuked and forgiven! Before I could even finish my prayer of confession, I had a totally different attitude about all the trash that would need to be picked up and hauled away. I was actually grateful and looking forward to

cleaning up the mess around our dumpster! I was blessed with the privilege of helping people get rid of their garbage, trash and junk!

Do you understand what I'm saying?

I. People Are Full of Garbage, Trash and Junk!

We're all full of garbage, trash and junk, the things that cause guilt, sorrow, embarrassment, shame, fear, feelings of inferiority, etc. All of this is *garbage, trash and junk* that we all need to get rid of. But where can we take it to get rid of it?

A. Often, we don't *take* it anywhere.

We suppress and repress it; we deny it; we cover it up with masks and facades; we allow it to build up until we are buried so deep it's all we can see (think of hoarders), or we explode in ways that hurts or confuses others.

I'm so glad we live in a society that provides such a service as trash removal! I've been to places where that service is not provided, and the sight and smell of those places is terrible! But the people have no one to take their trash away. So they just live with it. And they get weak, sick and diseased by it.

But where can we take the trash and garbage that cause guilt, sorrow, embarrassment, shame, fear, feelings of inferiority, etc.?

B. To the dump!

When the garbage truck came on Thursday morning, one of the garbage men removed all the overflow off the top of the dumpster, put it on the ground, and then emptied the dumpster in his truck and took it to the local dump grounds.

I had come that morning thinking I would have to put as much as I could in my truck and trailer to haul to the dump. But all I had to do was pick up what was left on the ground and put it in the now empty dumpster. (Including the box spring that I had to cut in half in order to fit it in the dumpster.) I then called the trash company and asked for a second pickup—which they did just a short time later.

I have to tell you, I actually enjoyed cleaning up that mess! I kept thinking about all the garbage, trash and junk in my mind and heart, and how often the Lord has to clean it all up when I come to him and ask for forgiveness.

But what does God do with all our garbage?

In the Old Testament, there was an animal called a scapegoat. The high priest would place his hand on the goat and confess all the sins of the people of Israel over it, and

then the goat was driven out into the wilderness, symbolizing the removing of Israel's guilt.

Jesus is our "scapegoat," our "dump." He took upon Himself our guilt and removed it from us. That's what we're told in Isaiah 53:

4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

That's why Jesus could say, 28 ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*** (Mt. 11:28)

All of the garbage, trash and junk that burdens us with guilt, sorrow, embarrassment, shame, fear, etc., all of that is removed when we realize that God loves us so much that He took all of that on Himself. And then He offers to clean us up and make us new persons in Christ!

One of the ways we can realize all of that is in prayer—confessing our sins and asking for forgiveness. That's how I realized my "trash removal" miracle the other evening.

II. God's Garbage Collectors

And as individual believers—all of whom make up the Church—we can be like "God's garbage collectors" when people come to us with their garbage, trash and junk and dump on us.

Perhaps this is one way we can understand what Paul said in Galatians 6: 1 ***Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.***

And what James wrote in 5:16 ***Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.***

Unfortunately, we as Christians sometimes increase people's burdens, rather than relieving them! We do this when we make them feel guilty and put requirements on them that God doesn't. Jesus criticized the "experts in the law" of His day for this very thing: ***"And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.*** (Lk. 11:46)

When others confess and confide in us, we must remember that we are Christ's ambassadors, His representatives, even His "garbage men" if you will. We must not be disinterested or uncompassionate. Neither must we become impatient, angry or resentful. Because just as God in Christ received us—with all our garbage, trash and junk—we too must be loving, forgiving and accepting.

When I filled my pickup truck with the bags of clothes, boxes of miscellaneous items and discards, I took it all to Teen Challenge, the Goodwill, and the dump. But I dropped it all off; I didn't have to distribute or destroy any of it.

In the same way, when others confess and confide in us, we don't have to solve the problems or change people. We are just representatives of Christ, who alone is able to forgive people's guilt and change them. But we have the privilege of assuring people that God will do all that for them in Christ.

Conclusion

From being angry and resentful, I actually became grateful and even happy about hauling away people's garbage, trash and junk away, because it became a symbol of all the Lord has "hailed" away for me, as well as a symbol of the privilege of being His "garbage man" and helping others look to Him to help them with their garbage.

I've been thinking. What if we put a sign on our dumpster that read,

Got garbage, trash or junk?
Bring it to our worship service on Sunday morning
and let Jesus Christ take it away for you and clean you up!

(I have to confess, I'm a little reluctant to actually put up such a sign for fear people might misunderstand it!)

Better yet, what if each of us imagined we wore a uniform that had "Christ's Garbage Collectors" written on it!?

If we will project His love, forgiveness and acceptance, we shouldn't be surprised if people "dump" all their cares, concerns and problems on us! Because we are His ambassadors, His representatives, His "garbage collectors." We don't take their sins and cares away, Christ does. But we have the privilege of directing people to Him and assuring them of His love, forgiveness and acceptance, because He took away all our "garbage, trash and junk."