

“BLESSING OTHERS WITH YOUR LIFE”
Deuteronomy 15:7-11, James 2:14-18, Luke 14:7-14
May 5 & 6, 2018

Vernal E. Simms, senior pastor of Morris Brown A.M.E. Church in Philadelphia, [*From One Brother to Another*, edited by William J. Key and Robert Johnson-Smith II (Judson, 1996)] **tells this** marvelous account of blessing others with our lives. He says:

“I grew up in a rough Boston housing project called Columbia Point in a family of nine children. Although I'd been a hardworking student, paying for college seemed impossible. But my mother's favorite expression was ‘Pray, and the Lord will make a way somehow.’ I viewed that as good advice for other people. But when I decided to go to college and seminary because I believed the Lord had a call on my life, I had no other choice!

“I packed for college and even went to orientation, but still didn't have any money. I'd have to pack up my belongings and make the hundred-mile trip back home. But an heir to a corporate fortune heard about my plight and paid for my college and seminary education. After I graduated, I went to my benefactor's office to thank him for all he had done for me and asked him what I could do to pay him back.

“Imagine my saying to a multimillionaire, ‘What can I do to repay you?’ The man responded, ‘Help somebody.’ I've spent the last 35 years in the ministry with that goal in mind. I've pastored in the drug-ridden, crime-infested inner city as well as well-manicured suburbs. And I've learned that the blessing of God is like a boomerang. **As I've tried to help somebody, the Lord has blessed me.**”¹

We've been exploring how to be a blessing to others by using the blessings we have received from the Lord God in order to impact the lives of those around us. As we have worked our way through this series “Blessed to be a Blessing” we heard how to touch the lives of others through our words, through our prayers, and today, through our lives. **We have not been blessed by God just to feel good,** but so that we might influence the lives of others by using those blessings to help others find faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Pastor Vernal Simms found his life blessed and was given the challenge to bless others. And we are given that same challenge today. Our blessings are to be used to bless others so that they might come to know the Lord.

¹ (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2002] pg. 249-250)

Matthew 6:19-20 tells us, “Stop storing up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moths and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. Instead, store up treasures for yourselves in heaven.” This command from Jesus does not say we shouldn’t store up treasures, but tells us **not to focus** on the treasures of THIS WORLD. We are to focus on storing up treasures IN HEAVEN by using the blessings we have received here on the earth. Everything here on the earth is temporary, so we are to use the blessings from God to store up treasures in heaven by touching the lives of others here around us. Treasures in heaven are for all eternity. Whenever you help others and you’re a blessing to them, you’re storing up treasure in heaven.

Today we’re going to look at three ways to begin to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

1. The first way to store up treasure in heaven is **I must care about those who suffer**. First let me say that the mindset for much of our world is that we are to look out for our own #1 – ME. The world says if someone is hurting around us, or someone is less fortunate than we are, well SORRY, but that’s just life! But let’s look at what Jesus tells us to do as His followers. Listen to Luke 14:7-14. (READ Luke 14:7-14)

Let’s look into this for just a moment. Jesus has been invited to join a prominent Pharisee for a Sabbath meal, but the invitation is not out of being friendly with Jesus. No, Luke tells us in 14:1, “*...and they were watching Jesus closely*” (14:1). The Pharisees were determined to find something to condemn Jesus for and prove that He was not the Messiah. So while He was at the meal, Jesus questions the Pharisees about healing on the Sabbath and then invites the people there to consider how God sees the importance of their social status. Jesus tells them that they are not to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, but rather humbly consider themselves as servants of God. They are to humble themselves rather than fight over the most prominent places at the table. And they are to look out for those “less than” they are.

But then Jesus addresses the host of the meal and challenges him to something greater. Jesus tells him, “*When you put on a dinner don’t invite your friends and your relatives and your rich neighbors, for they will repay you by inviting you back...Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Then at the resurrection of the godly, God will reward you for inviting those who could not repay you*” (14:13-14).

Jesus tells us to not focus on the ones who are already blessed with abundance, but look out at those who are less blessed and find how we might be a blessing to them. Jesus is telling us that when we reach out to

those who are socially, economically, financially and physically impaired, God notices. So as we intentionally reach out to those who can never repay us, we are making deposits into our heavenly accounts where we are storing up treasures in heaven. Jesus invites us to adjust our thinking about those around us and to humble ourselves and begin to look at the people as children of God and people of value.

He modeled that by healing the man with “dropsy” just prior to the meal. Dropsy is a condition that involves the accumulation of fluids in body cavities or in our extremities. It is associated with congestive heart failure, so the man was basically incapacitated and unable to do any work or support his family. By healing him, Jesus brought new life to this man as well as to his family. He would now be a contributing member.

And we see throughout the Bible instructions to use the blessings we have to impact the lives of the less fortunate, the hurting and the oppressed. During His ministry, Jesus gave us five specific categories of people in which to focus on to bless with our own lives. Let’s go through them quickly.

#1. Jesus commands us to **care about the hungry and the homeless poor**. Isaiah 58:7 instructs us to “*share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear.*”

#2. Jesus commands us to **care for the orphans and widows**. With all the wars and terrorism going on throughout the world, there is great need to care for the orphan and widow. But how often do we even think about them? James 1:27 points out explicitly “*what God considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering.*”

#3. Jesus commands us to **care about prisoners**. We are to see to the needs of those in prison. Hebrews 13:3 tells us to “*remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.*”

#4. Jesus commands us to **care about immigrants**. That means people who live by you that speak different languages because they are from different countries. God says that we are to love them. Deuteronomy 10:19 says, “*You must show love to foreigners.*”

#5. Jesus commands us to **care about the sick and afflicted**. Now afflicted means someone in constant and major pain, like a terminal or severe illness. In Jesus’ day it would have been leprosy. Today it would be

like AIDS or Cancer. Ezekiel 34:4 reminds us “*you have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured.*” Conditions are not real bad here in the United States, but when we begin to look around the world, there is a great need for us to step up and make a difference.

Now the first step to caring for those who suffer is to become aware of the needs around us. We’re not bad people but we are very busy people. We all live very full and busy lives. We have allowed ourselves to wear blinders as we go through life. We’re deaf, we’re dumb and we’re blind to the needs around us. Sadly we’ve been trained to avert our eyes when we see homeless people standing along the road with signs saying “Will work for food” or some other words. We look away, we ignore them and drive right by. We don’t look over where the homeless person is because if we were to make eye contact with them we would be looking into the eyes of a fellow human being and that might mean we have to care.

Or what about the plastic donation containers at check-out counters seeking support for this family or that person. And aren’t those people in jail getting what they deserve? That’s what many people think, so we don’t even think about them. And those commercials that come on TV showing little brown skinned children with orange hair and bulging bellies; we have problems looking at them because if we were to let our hearts become soft for just one moment, they might break and we’d end up crying our eyes out at what they are going through. And then we have news reports that tell us about the AIDs epidemic in Africa, or the drought situation in Sudan, or the typhoons taking place in the Philippines, or the earthquake that hit South America. All these are opportunities for us to step up to help and what do we do? Many times we complain about the number of Missions of the Month we have in church. We complain that we’re always being asked for money. We complain that we’re being asked AGAIN to help this person or that group.

But folks, we live in the richest nation of the world, and we are among the wealthiest people on the planet. Yes, this church does a lot for the needs of others, but we have a long ways to go. Jesus invites us to take the time to look around us, see the desperate need that others have, and then use our blessings from the Lord to meet those needs. And the more we do, the more God will bless us so that we can do more. We can never out- give God. He is generous with His blessings to those who are willing to use those blessings to touch the lives of people around them. I pray that we might have God’s eyes for just one minute to see what He sees

– all the hurt, all the struggle, all the chaos, all the desperation, all the wandering. We are the servants of God, and He has blessed us so that we might take care of His people and then send up treasures in heaven.

So what's the first step going to be for you?

2. So the second way that I store up treasures in heaven is **I must make a difference**. It's one thing to see the need around us and feel pity. It's one thing to feel sympathy for the condition of others. It's quite another thing to do something about it and make a difference in the lives of others.

Jesus is asking us to do something. If we see a need that someone has, Jesus calls us to step up and do something about it. We are called to put feet on our feelings and let our faith hit the pavement so that we can make a difference by doing something. Jesus calls us into action, to mobilize ourselves and actually do something, and when we do that, we're storing up treasures in heaven.

On your sheet today I have listed a few Bible verses that talk about this. I John 3:18 tells us, "*Our love should not just be words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action.*" Real love acts when troubles arise. It's not just something we say or feel. It's what we do that shows. John wants us to prove our faith by our actions.

And then James 2:15-16 gets even more blunt; "*Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, and you say, 'God bless you; stay warm and eat well?' but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?*" The answer is it does absolutely nothing. It's just worthless, empty emotion. To prove our faith we have to DO SOMETHING with our life that gives us significance and provides satisfaction.

Too often we let our significance be the job we have or the social standing we enjoy or the area of town that we live in. But we all want to have significance – we all want to feel like life matters – that we're not just taking up space, gather a bunch of resources around us, breathe, live and die. Everyone wants to have meaning and significance.

And we want to be able to feel like our life matters. Satisfaction does not come with what we have, because someone will always have more than we do. It's not about what we have but how we use what we have that counts.

Our significance and our satisfaction in life come from service to others, helping people when they need it. It's the only way that we'll feel good about ourselves. Nothing else is going to meet the desire for us outside of serving the needs of others. It's just the way we are.

Mark 8:35 says it like this, "*Only those who throw away their lives for my sake and for the sake of the Good News will ever know what it means to really live.*" Living for ourselves is not really living, it's just existing. And we need more than just existing to be satisfied with our life and have significance.

Today I lifted up two opportunities for you to begin serving, even three – putting together a flood bucket for folks recovering from the devastation of floods, contributing a few bucks to buy Bibles for Muslim converts to Christianity, and working with youth on their mission trip. These are not really hard things to do, so they are a step in the direction of creating treasures in heaven that will endure for all eternity.

Think about it a moment: if you were caught in a flood, wouldn't you want to have cleaning supplies given to you to help get everything put back into place? If that is something that you would want when that flood hits your area, couldn't you touch the life of a person in another area that needs just that same reassurance and hope you would be looking for? That's what I'm talking about – making a difference in the life of another person who's in trouble and needs help.

Or what about your conversion experience? When you first became a Christian, wasn't it nice to have a Bible that you could actually read about Jesus and grow in your faith? Well, there are people coming to know that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and Savior of the world who desperately need to read about Him. To have their own Bible would make a huge difference, and could multiply the revival with others coming to know Jesus, too.

Or taking a week to go with some of the youth from our church to Delaware in order to make a difference in the lives of people there? How many people's lives would you be touching by being there? Not only the youth of this church, but all those at the work site. WOW! Talk about making a difference!

But there's so much more you can do, too. Soup kitchens, volunteering, the community meal, LOVE Inc., and the list goes on and on. A little support from each person takes the name of Jesus into the world and builds your treasure in heaven. Yes, it requires something from you, but what you have is not yours anyway; it belongs to the Lord who has given you stewardship over it so that you might make a difference with it. You

see, “*if you wait for perfect conditions (to serve), you will never get anything done*” (Ecclesiastes 11:4). If you really want to make your life count for something, touch the life of another person, especially the person who has nothing, or is sick, or has lost husband or parents, or anyone who cannot repay you for your help. It will not only change the life of that person; it will change your life, too.

These last four weeks we’ve been investigating how we are “Blessed to be a Blessing.” So what does that mean? What are you going to do about it? You leave here today and say, “Oh, wasn’t that a nice series we had? Didn’t Pastor Warren deliver that nicely? Let’s go out for lunch, or go home and watch a movie. Don’t just let my words roll off your back like water on a duck. Look around, see what you can do, reach out and touch another’s life.

So what’s the next step you’re going to make?

3. The last way to begin storing up treasures in heaven is **I must share whatever I have**. First you share your heart. Then you start sharing your time and your talents. Then you share your treasure, what you’ve got at your disposal to help another. You don’t just write a check and say, “I’ve done my duty.” No, you share your heart, then you share your time and your talent, and your ability and your schedule, then you share your resources.

Now, I know some of you are saying to yourself, “There he goes again, asking us for more money.” No, that’s not what it’s about. I’m asking you to get involved in the lives of others and then using the resources you have on hand to make a difference in that person’s life. I’m asking you to think beyond yourself to see the needs of others who CANNOT help themselves, and make a difference in the life of that person. I’m talking about seeing the opportunity to bring someone out of the depths of hell by presenting them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I’m talking about turning the life of a young person around so that they might have hope and real life because they see it in you giving of yourself to help them. I’m talking about doing whatever is necessary to save that person from drug addiction, or give that person something to look forward to as you visit them, or providing someone a skill or a trade that they can live off of. I’m talking about standing up for the weak, supporting the hopeless, encouraging the lost and helping the homeless. I’m talking about doing something for the Lord that might demand more of you than you think is possible. I’m asking what’s that next step for you?

You see, I Timothy 6:18-19 instructs me to, *“Tell people to use their money to do good...They should give happily to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them. By doing this they will be storing up real treasures for themselves in heaven – it is the only safe investment for eternity! And they will be living a fruitful Christian life down here as well.”* As a servant of Jesus Christ we need to use what God has blessed us with to bless the lives of others. Otherwise why should God continue to bless us?

I want you to hear this. *“When you give to the poor, it is like lending to the Lord, and the Lord will pay you back.”* (Proverbs 19:17). Remember we can't out-give God! The more we give, the more He'll give back, so we will never run out, but always have an abundance in order to bless others.

So let me close today with just one more Scripture. We heard it earlier from Deuteronomy 15 (7-10). Hear it once more, for it is a promise with a tremendous blessing attached to it. *“When you happen on someone who's in trouble or needs help...don't look the other way pretending you don't see him. Don't keep a tight grip on your purse...Give freely and spontaneously. Don't have a stingy heart. The way you handle matters like this triggers God's blessing in everything you do, all your work and ventures.”*

God has blessed you to be a blessing so that you may touch the life of another, thereby sharing God's blessings with all people. I pray you will do this with great love for the Lord Jesus Christ.