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The Rubbish Dump Jesus Was In!

Reflections The Passion, Cross and Resurrection 18 July 2022

Luke 22:44

Luke 22:53

Ephesians 6:12

A few weeks ago, the Senior Members' Fellowship of the church I attend met to discuss some future activities. Our leader proposed a project he called the "No to Plastic" project. We collect a great deal of plastic, and do not know how to dispose of it safely. He has a plan, and we shall put it into operation shortly. But plastic is not the only refuse we accumulate: we have used batteries, and a good deal of electrical and electronic waste to deal with, not to mention kilos of food and kitchen waste besides.

I read, some years ago, of someone who had launched a project to excavate landfills of rubbish across the world, in order to document the eating habits, dressing styles, general economic conditions, and behavioural patterns of the population. I thought it an interesting study, one likely to yield important findings once such data was properly examined. My thoughts also went back to 2007, when another socially engaged member of my church undertook a study of the slums that existed in and around our city. Her startling finding was that over a thousand children, of every age, were engaged in rag-picking from the filthy rubbish dumps. They were unschooled, and were as unkempt as the filth they dealt with, in their behaviour, their language, and their physical hygiene. As a church, we took up their cause as subjects worth investing in: they were picked up, prepared, and instructed in the basics of learning, before being placed in mainstream schools after a few years with us. Several of them were completely transformed, and a few have gone on to a college education. We found gems within the rubbish dump.

We witness a frenzy, in our homes, in the localities we live in, in our cities, and among our governments, to find ways of hiding and disposing of this ugly rubbish. No matter what we do to hide it, sooner or later it will decompose, and it will stink. Have you thought of the rubbish within you? No local government will help you dispose of that. You need

to look to Jesus, and to Jesus alone, for help.

Have you ever thought about the refuse with which Jesus Christ was surrounded? Do you recall the Sunday that came before the Friday on which He was crucified? Thousands of people thronged the streets He passed along, riding upon a donkey. They shouted "Hosanna," and greeted Him with palm leaves. Do you know what they were? They were the rubbish around Him. Five days later, they were shouting, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." On the night before His death, a veritable landfill of woes tumbled in upon Him. You see it now. Between the prayer at Gethsemane, through the mock trial, and His death upon the Cross, this must be the darkest scene in the whole history of human drama. Though the entire episode, from Gethsemane to Calvary, took place within less than a day, that day held badness enough to fill a thousand dumpsters. Search as you might, you will not find so much as a speck of courage, character, or goodness in a single person who was there, other than Jesus Himself. You will find only a heap of deceit and betrayal. Yet in all that dump of rubbish, Jesus saw reason to hope — hope for the very people who made up that rubbish dump. He wanted to pull His people out of the dump they were in, to cleanse them, and to make them worthy of Him. You and I are included among them.

That night at Gethsemane was marked by one crisis after another. We might wonder endlessly about the unanswered prayers He made to His Father in Heaven. We know that He was under such great stress that His sweat became like blood (Luke 22:44). Would any father leave his son in such a state? I wonder.

At the Last Supper, He was not harsh with Judas, in that He allowed him to leave the table to betray Him. Later, He allowed Judas to kiss Him, as he carried out his final act of betrayal. Perhaps you think of Judas as the most evil person who ever lived. Yet the crowd he led did not have as much closeness to Jesus as Judas himself had. But was Jesus betrayed by Judas alone? All His disciples deserted Him. They too were part of that rubbish. If I said that Jesus was neck-deep in refuse, would you agree with me?

But that is not how Jesus saw it. He saw something else. Though He knew of the rubbish dump He was in, He was not confined to it. He was able to see the good within the bad, the purpose within the pain, and God's presence within the problem. Drawing on my last piece, in which I wrote of blind Bartimaeus, I would say we may see in this a little of Christ's own clear-sightedness. You see, you and I live in a trashy world. Unwanted rubbish surrounds us; we too have unanswered prayers, unbelievable betrayals, deceit, hatred, and whole sacks of mishap and

heartbreak. Allow me to ask: what are we doing about it?

The rubbish in our lives cannot be hidden for long. It will grow beyond us, and it will begin to stink. You cannot simply pretend that it does not exist; you need to deal with it. If we follow the example of Jesus Christ, we shall come to see hard times differently. Jesus found good within the bad; so too can you. Remember, Judas was a thief; he was unreliable; he was a rogue and an out-and-out opportunist. Yet he lived in the presence of God, and witnessed the miracles of God the Son, Jesus Christ. How can we see any good in such a person? But Jesus did. Judas remained His follower; not all the blame can be laid at his door alone. Jesus said to the crowd that came to arrest Him, "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). Paul took up the same thought, and wrote, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12).

The rubbish is within us too. Do not allow it to decompose and stink. Seek the help of God the Holy Spirit within you, to dispose of it at the earliest opportunity. Do not try to lay the blame upon others for your own troubles; they too are victims of a fallen world. Jesus found good in a person like Judas, enough to call him "friend." He can help us do the same with those who hurt us, and with those who treat us as rubbish.

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