

The last two days have been SOUPY outside.

I was out picking weeds in the front yard the other day
As the sun was beating down on me and I was all sweaty and thinking
“Yep, summer is here.”

Unfortunately, if you work in office, it doesn't mean you can wear shorts & t-shirt
You're still throwing on dress socks & sweating your guts out
Which I selfishly think stinks for me
But I look over at Emily, my wife, who is 22 weeks pregnant
And I think, “Yikes, that's rough for her!”
It's a LONG hot summer to be pregnant in Oklahoma!

We are so excited to have Odom kid #3
And it's really a wild year for us
Because within 2 weeks of finding out that we were going to have a baby
We found out as a CHURCH that we are going to have a baby
As we get ready to launch a satellite congregation in midtown Tulsa
Making some great progress on the plans for the satellite

Pregnancy is hard, awkward, you're stretched, uncertain of what's coming
You're thinking, “Are we up for this?”
“What affect is this new baby going to have on the family?”
You're gearing up for the physical/emotional/financial impact
Of bringing a new life into the world
You don't know what this kid is going to look like or what you'll name it
My family is feeling that

And as a church family we're feeling that, too, as we're in the early stages
Of being pregnant, so to speak, with a new satellite congregation
Lots of questions, we're looking to experts to give us some coaching
We're feeling excited & also a little discomfort
We're being stretched, we're imagining what the future will be like
We've got to remember the goal at the end: Why are we doing this?
We want babies! Sons/daughters in God's family. Want to reach people for X
So we gotta keep our eyes on the prize!

I remember when my son, Sam, was 1 we got him this stuffed lion for Xmas
And we knew when he saw it, he'd give it this big hug
And it would become this thing he'd drag around everywhere
And so when he opened it, we were excited to see his response
But we discovered—as so many parents have—that Sam
Was more excited about the wrapping paper & the box than the gift
And it is so funny how that continues to prove true in our house

We've got a closet full of toys, but the kids are entertaining themselves
With a piece of string tied to a chip clip
Which one kid is hooking on to another so they can pretend they have a pet
I think, "Why get all these toys when we could just go to the junk drawer
And grab some odds/ends and kept the kids equally entertained?"
Kids are like MacGyver—they can turn any 2 pieces of junk into hours of fun

As parents, we have these filters for decision-making for our kids
Based on our own values/experiences/priorities
And then you have these moments of clarity where you realize
That what you think they really need—or what really matters
Isn't really something they need and it doesn't really matter all that much
We go to great lengths to get some novelty, some new stimulation
When our kid would be just as delighted to sit on the floor with us
And play with tissue and cardboard (at least for a season)

This example with kids draws attention to this bigger question:
What if the filters we have for evaluating what we really need in life
To make us feel fulfilled and whole and happy
What if those filters are incomplete, misguided or flat out wrong?
What if some of those things we think really, really matter
In the final evaluation, don't matter all that much?

What if we spent our lives pursuing those goals
Only to find that having achieved them
They didn't deliver on what we were anticipating
And we find ourselves with little time to make up for what's lost
So you spend your life pursuing X, only to find it was Y that you really needed

In Luke 12, Jesus draws attention to this very dynamic

He's preaching and teaching and healing in a crowd of some thousands
When a man cries out, "Lord, tell my brother to divide inheritance w/me."
Now, I don't know what this guy was expecting Jesus to do
But I have a feeling Jesus' response to him was NOT it.

Jesus said (I paraphrase) "Hey man, don't bring me into the middle of this!"

And then he warned the man:

"Watch out! Be on your guard against ALL KINDS of greed;
Life does not consist of an abundance of possessions."

I think this little verse demonstrates the brilliance of Jesus

Be on guard against ALL kinds of greed

Our particular expressions of greed can be deceptively diverse

Greed does not always look like Scrooge McDuck diving into a pool of \$

Greed can twist/turn/contort itself into a million different positions

Whether it's hoarding \$/friends/attention/likes/stuff/pick your poison

At its core, it comes down to this discontent desire to have more

To see more, experience more; MORE becomes an end in itself, more for ME

And greed, according to Jesus, is so dangerous

Because it skews our ability to wisely evaluate what really matters in life

Greed is a filter & when we see life through the lens of greed, of acquisition

It pollutes our worldview and leads down a destructive path

But maybe more worse than that, it leads us down a boring path

Because we are missing out on the things that truly make a life meaningful

"Be on guard against all kinds of greed," says Jesus

"Because life does NOT consist of an abundance of possessions."

Saying what life does NOT consist of naturally makes you ask

"Then what does it consist of..." And if you've asked that, you're paying attn.

But Jesus doesn't answer the implicit question right away

Instead he tells a story of a man who accumulated more and more

And got nice & cozy, put his feet up & used his wealth to make himself snug

Until God confronted the man & said "Tonight your life is demanded of you.

And you can't take your stuff to the grave."

“This is how it’ll be w/folks who are rich for self, but not rich toward God.”

He had been addressing crowds, the many 1000s there, but then he turns:

Luke 12:22-34 (Pew Bible, p. 1618)

“Then Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourself that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.’”

Jesus’ address here is for those who are following him

He assumes that those who have committed to being his disciples

Are going to behave differently than the majority in the crowd

Because life does not consist of an abundance of possession, says Jesus...

And b/c there are consequences for storing up stuff for yourself

And not being rich toward God

“Do not worry about your life, particularly what you’ll eat, what you’ll wear”

In context, it’s safe to say Jesus is talking about more than just food/clothes

A way of rephrasing what Jesus is getting at:

Don’t occupy yourself w/CONSUMPTION (food) & VANITY (clothes)

Don’t allow the substance of your life to be about stuff & image

Life is more than the products/services/experiences you consume

There is more to life than busying yourself with image-management

For several years, I've been inspired & troubled by this quote from Blaise Pascal:

"All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone." (Blaise Pascal)

I think the quote has troubled me b/c we are a nation of consumers

And I am certainly a product of it

I've admitted before that I have addicted behaviors toward technology

And it is extremely difficult to keep from consuming content on screens

And it is increasingly difficult to be alone with my thoughts

It's difficult because we are untrained in silence & reflection

Now, listen, I don't think there's anything wrong with CONSUMING

But if our identity is based upon the things that we consume

Shows/movies we watch, books we read, products we use

If you can't have a meaningful conversation w/other people

That's NOT about stuff other people created, there may be a problem

And I don't think there's anything wrong with considering our image

We should steward our reputation & consider how we relate to the world

But if what occupies you in life is primarily projecting an image on OUTSIDE

If life is all about OPTICS (being seen & managing how you're seen by others)

And you give little thought to cultivating the person you are on the INSIDE

There's a problem; you were created to be a person w/a rich inner life

If you can't sit in a room alone—w/o consuming & w/o being seen (problem)

Jesus is drawing attention to contrast between our outer/inner life:

Yes, you have money to spend. But what are you spending your life on?

Yes, you are finely dressed. But what kind of person are you dressing?

You're connected w/so many people on social media, but are you friends?

Jesus: Don't occupy yourself with consumption and image (food and clothes)

Because your Father knows you have some basic needs here

And he cites two examples in nature: Ravens (an unclean animal) & flowers

If God cares for this smelly/unclean animal, won't he care for you?

If God cares about flowers that come/go in a season, won't he care for you?

Of course he will.

Because you are valuable to God. You matter to him.

Your needs are valid and your Father knows just what you need.

So then, you needn't occupy yourself, you needn't be consumed by

You needn't allow your greatest ambitions in life to be comprised of

This drive to consume and to maintain an image

Jesus said "The pagan world runs after these things..."

And my goodness, yes they do. Pay attention to how many ads you see today

Invitations to CONSUME in order to bolster your IMAGE

These may define the masses, but they mustn't define and drive disciples.

So what should?

V. 31- "But seek his kingdom and these things will be given to you as well."

With all of the time/energy/ambition that we usually direct to consuming

Or to managing our image

Let's redirect it, says Jesus, to seeking the Kingdom of God

And then, anticipating our uncertainty about what that means

And what it's going to cost us

Jesus says: "Do not be afraid... your Father is delighted to give you the KOG."

So, all of the conversation has been leading to this point

Life doesn't consist of abundance of possessions...OK what does it consist of?

Don't occupy yourself w/consumption & vanity...OK what should we occupy?

And Jesus finally responds w/this invitation to seek the KOG

What is the KOG? What does it mean to seek KOG?

What does it mean for Father to give us KOG?

As we read the Gospels, we almost never see a plain/obvious definition of KOG

But the message of the KOG is always accompanied by action

And it's often explained in metaphor (The Kingdom of God is like...)

In Luke 10, Jesus sends out a group of 72 disciples to do ministry like him

He gave them authority to preach and to heal. He told them:

"Heal the sick who are there & tell them, 'The KOG has come near you.'

Now if you're lame, or blind, or if your skin is covered in leprosy
And a person comes to you, places their hands on you & heals you
And say "The KOG has come near to you."
How would you define the KOG?
The KOG is HEALING, it's divine intervention, it's reverse-hopelessness

The Kingdom of God is healing/forgiveness/recovery/HOPE
The KOG is the stuff that shouldn't happen, that can't happen, happening.
The message of the KOG was ultimately a message about the King
Who had come near.
And the demonstration of his nearness were these sad things coming untrue

Now, during Jesus' ministry—and during our lifetime—
We don't have to actively seek the kingdom of the enemy
There are signs all around us; it seems to follow where we go
The reality is that humanity staged a coup d'état & we know well
The consequences of our rebellion (our world is so very broken)
We saw further evidence of that this week in Manchester

But in the middle of this chaotic mess that is our world
Jesus taught that the KOG was breaking in; how was he coming?
Jesus said the KOG was a like a mustard seed, started small, growing big...
It was like a treasure found buried in a field, sold his possessions to acquire
The KOG was breaking in quietly, a covert operation, a quiet controversy
The means by which God was upending humanity's reign of destruction
And establishing his dominion over the earth

And Jesus invites his people—seek the KINGDOM
Seek the proof God has come near; chase the evidence that he's the boss
Make your ambition nothing less than enacting his reign on the earth

When we work to heal/restore/forgive/reconcile/make peace, we're seeking
When we pray, when we fast, when we worship and we serve the poor
When we tell stories/create; write music & practice generosity
When we make it our ambition to rebel against the status quo
Of consumption and image-management; when we share the gospel

And when we invite God to prove yet again that he is the King of the earth
We are kingdom seeking

I watched a documentary recently on North Korea

And the propaganda machine within the country is POWERFUL
On every street corner, in every shop, in every home
Are pictures, shrines, idols dedicated to the governing family
And it's so saddening to see how this nation is cut off from the outside world
They've been duped into believing that this abusive, indulgent tyrant
Is the savior of the nation, defender of goodness & after their best interest
Their perspective is so limited, but their vision is veiled & they can't see it
Unless someone intervenes from the outside

And the same is true for us. We live in a kind of spiritual North Korea.

We have such a small vision, seeing world thru the lens of our experience
We see all around us the evidence of the kingdom of the enemy
The world can be such a scary and depressing place, but we take it as normal
And yet, and yet, and yet... there are whispers that there's more to the story.
That there is a rival kingdom. One that will displace current administration.
One that, in fact, preceded it.

And those among us who buy into the rumors are compelled

To dedicate our lives, to make our life's ambition the quest to learn more
Whatever we were doing before—playing the game of consumption/vanity
Is now a thing of the past, we have no greater purpose now than to
Experience in our time the toppling of powers of the kingdom of the enemy
And the installation as king of the one whom we worship
Jesus Christ, the lamb slain to save the world
Resurrected in power & ascended to the place of all authority over the earth

And it would please our King to let us in on the rebellion

For him to give us eyes to see his in-breaking Kingdom
And to welcome us as citizens of the same

If you're tired and discontent; if you're hopeless of our present course
If you're suspicious that this was not the way it was meant to be
If you're spending yourself on consumption and vanity
And finding yourself dissatisfied, you're on the right track.

“It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses*

There's more to life than playing with mud pies in the slum.

Pay attention to the rumors.

Seek the Kingdom.

Let's pray.