

Jason Upchurch - Ecclesiastes 3:6 - Keep It Or Cast It Away?

We are definitely on the downhill side of the mountain with the poem.

This morning we're covering **Vss. 6-7** - basically two sets of couplets.

Seek/lose, keep/cast away. Losing and casting away are similar and seeking and keeping are similar as well.

Big Picture: As Christians who follow the Lord Jesus we are called to wisdom. And we need to do the right thing at the right time.

When I was a young lad of 20 years old I was working with a journeyman granite installer and I remember being on a job with him. We were putting a small piece of granite on a counter and somehow as we were carrying the piece in we bumped the cabinet and a screw driver fell down behind the cabinet. A small cheap screwdriver. And the installer - who was my boss of sorts - spent the next hour trying to fetch the screwdriver from behind the cabinet. This was a \$2 screwdriver and he was making \$20/hour 24 years ago.

What was happening? He was wasting time and money on cheap screwdriver that should have just been left behind. He was seeking something when he should have been okay losing it.

Now here's the deal, that's a silly illustration but I'll bet most of us could come up with other situations where we seek things or keep things when we should really get rid of them.

Or when we've thrown something away - we've cast it off - and we should have kept it. Sometimes those are the hardest ones.

I mention that story because it's obvious that that was a bad idea. He's making \$20/hour and fussing over a \$2 screwdriver and you think he's so bad he's lost \$18. But he didn't lose \$18. He lost a lot more than that. Because I'm standing there watching him. And I was making \$10/hour at the time. So that's a \$28 screwdriver. But that's not all of it. Because of that we didn't get our next job finished so we had to go back to that job. So then add in our wage again, the extra gas, time on the job, billing. So let's double that. So we're at a \$56 screwdriver.

But it's actually worse than that. Because he didn't actually retrieve the screwdriver. The screwdriver is still behind a cabinet in West Richland to this very day. Which means we had to go buy another screwdriver and spend company time and money to do that.

I share that story because it's classic of people not knowing when to seek and when to lose. When to keep and when to cast away.

That's an extreme example but I think we've all been there. Do you hang on to that book you haven't read in 10 years? Do you keep that massive box of photos you'll never really go through? What about that old tool or car you probably just won't get around to fixing? If you just drive around in the country you'll pass people who just collect cars and rvs with the idea that they'll fix them up but there's not enough time in 10 lifetimes to fix up all they have. So there's massive collection.

We'll maybe we don't collect cars, but we have a massive collection of something else. Maybe it's time to let that go.

Or maybe you should be looking for something. Maybe you should be looking for a job or a spouse or a better source of income. You do need a better fridge. You do need a better car. You do need something and you keep putting it off and off and it gets harder and harder as time goes on.

Or it's harder because you have to have the perfect thing and won't be content with anything other than what you have in your mind. So you're in analysis paralysis. The perfect has become the enemy of the good.

Solomon says there's an element of wisdom we need to have when it comes to what we pursue and what we don't pursue. And especially our possessions because the possessions we have aren't really ours - they're the Lord's. We're stewards of what we have.

So what I want to do this morning is step on your toes for a while. Make you feel uncomfortable. Really what I want to do is challenge you to think about the things you have and where you're at in life. And are the decisions you're making helping you follow Jesus better? Are they helping you love other people better? Is your stuff helping you love God and love neighbor better?

Or are you a slave to indecision or possessions? Maybe things are weighing you down and keeping you enslaved.

One of the difficulties with these issues is that there is no clear line of sin. But when we step back and look we realize there's something really bad going on.

One way to think through these issues is to think in extremes. You've probably seen those apartment bachelor pads where there's just a TV, a lawn chair and lamp in the living room? That guy probably needs to buy some things.

But I think in our culture we usually have a problem with keeping things - with refusing to lose them. So that's where we'll spend most of our time.

The extreme end of keeping things is hoarders.

If anyone has a problem with seeking, losing, keeping, casting away it's hoarders. What is a hoarder? It's someone who "has a persistent difficulty discarding possessions...and has an intense distress over getting rid of items." (Psychiatry.org)

It's so bad that there's actually a clinical diagnoses called hoarding disorder. Hoarding is different than simply collecting because hoarding itself usually causes problems in relationships and ability to function correctly. You have so many things that your living area is a fire hazard. You have so much stuff you are paralyzed when you thinking about cleaning any of it. The quantity is so overwhelming you can't even go to work because you can't find what you need to function and you won't allow people in your house because you know it's so bad that they shouldn't come it.

Or in the worst extremes you don't even think it's a problem, you think it's rather normal and don't even notice how bad it has become.

There's a house in Richland we walked by a few weeks ago. It was a hoarder house that caught fire. But it wasn't just the house that was bad - it was their half acre lot filled with junk 8 feet tall. The whole thing caught fire and it took the city condemning the property and taking out 80 something full size trash containers of junk to clean it all out. That's a problem.

It's a sinful relationship with possessions. It's a type of greed that views scrap metal as equal to gold. Or it can be a type of fear that says "if I get rid of this thing the consequence will be so severe that I'll live in perpetual regret."

Now, hoarding is the extreme. Maybe you know someone who does this. But I think as a culture we've become accustomed to having a large amount of stuff and we struggle with low grade hoarding.

How many of our garages and attics are packed with things we haven't looked at in years and probably never will? But we can't imagine getting rid of them usually because we have some sort of sentimental attachment? Or it's so much we know it'll take weeks to get through it.

And if you're sitting there thinking "yeah, but I might need that sometime" I'm talking to you. If you died and going through your stuff would be a burden to the people in your life, you might want to consider that it's not a season for seeking and keeping. It's probably a season for losing and casting away.

In America, this has become so bad that the storage unit industry is just skyrocketing. If you run out of room in your house you rent a storage unit so that you never have to even look at the stuff that you will never use and sort through. You pay money so that you don't have to do the work of getting rid of things that you will never use again. You don't want them and don't want to look at them.

And here's the thing: a lot of the things we keep or even seek - we don't really want and neither does anyone else. If we died, they wouldn't want it. We're paying to store stuff no one wants.

That's why the storage industry is booming. There are something like 68,000 storage units in the US with something like 2.4 billion square feet of storage space. You know Super Walmart? It's like 13,000 Super Walmarts of storage space. That's a problem.

Now, let me ask you this: if you knew a Christian was hoarding, would you think this is wise? Would having all kinds of stuff that you can't use and don't use and no one else can use exude godly stewardship? Probably not.

James 5:1-3 Come now you rich and weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth eaten. Your gold and your silver have and their corrosion is evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire?

He's talking about rich people who abuse poor people, but the examples he uses are the examples of the storage industry. We have so much stuff that moths eat our clothes before we use them again. Our couches in storage are out of style before we use them again. All of grandma's fine china is cracked before anyone uses it.

One way to look at our habits is: if you knew your elders were storing all this stuff, would you have concerns about their ability to lead the church? Yeah, you probably would.

We also see this with preppers. People who stock and stock rations and goods and whatever anticipating some doomsday scenario that, frankly, never comes. And some of you are like "But it could come!" I'm talking to you.

Now, is some preparation good? Of course. We found out in the last 6 years that it's good to have some extra toilet paper on hand. Some food and so on.

I think there's a good case to be made having some supplies on hand. I think there's some liberty here. Maybe you have 2 weeks, maybe someone else has 2 months. But I think when we start getting into Mormon territory of 2 years and fall out bunkers and now you've got bottles of whiskey to trade when the financial markets collapse - I think you're over the edge.

Let me give you 2 passages to look at on this. **Turn to Jas. 4:13-17.**

This is a common passage. But a good reminder for us. **Read 13-17**

What do we see here. When we make plans - whether to get something or get rid of it - we need to take into account what the Lord might have for us.

Maybe we don't say we'll go to such and such a town to buy and sell, but sometimes we think "I'll get to that project today or tomorrow or next week." And next week comes and goes. And it dangles on us and bugs us. But then we add another thing and another thing. And pretty soon we're not doing anything well and we're not getting to anything we wanted to.

James isn't saying we shouldn't go make a profit or that we shouldn't travel. Really what he's saying is we need to consider the Lord's will in all of this. What does Jesus want when it comes to our stuff?

Does he want us to just accumulate and accumulate? Are we like the guy who got a windfall crop and just builds bigger and bigger barns just stacking up stuff? Remember what the Lord said to him? You fool - this night your life is required of you.

Really what he wants when it comes to our pursuits to make sure he's in the equation. Can you in good conscience keep collecting all this stuff? Can you in good conscience keep building barns to store things? Or is it time to let go?

Turn to 1 Tim 6:6-10. This is the classic verse that basically teaches there are no uhaul trailers behind a hearse. **Read**

One of the reasons people stack and stack things is because they aren't content. I just need another pair of pants, I need another sweater. I need another kitchen gadget. I need another tool in the shop. And this is such a great deal - how could I pass this up? If I don't buy this thing right now it's almost like I'm losing money! That's the motto of the thrift saler.

Could you be content with just food and clothing? Because the reality is that that is all God has promised us with. And everything we collect now, we can't take with us.

Listen: If what you have would be a burden to your kids or your heirs, maybe it's time to downsize.

See, Paul isn't just talking about money. It could be any kind of riches. Any kind of material goods where our pursuit of them because out of order and we fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires.

I've known people who wander away from the faith because of all kinds of weird desires and fetishes with stuff. And it's not always money. A lot of times it is. But sometimes it's just weird pursuits.

By the way, one of the best ways to let go of things is offering them to people who could use it. Bless someone else. When we were first married we had nothing. And my friend's grandma was moving to a assisted living home. So our apartment living room which had been basically empty for a year was filled with all kinds of 1970s furniture. We were living in Everybody Loves Raymond but we finally had couches - praise the Lord.

Now, I've been focusing on stuff, but we need wisdom on when to keep all kinds of things. When to keep friends - maybe it's time to clean up your friend group a little.

When to keep sentimental things. When to keep homes. You know as you get older you should think about your living situation. Can you manage it? A lot of people move to our area to get 10 or 20 or 50 acres and they forget that as they get older it's hard to take care of all that. And they don't usually give it up until after it's too difficult.

You get the idea.

The flip side of that is that there are times to keep things. And times to seek things out. I'm a minimalist by nature. Some people's love language is physical touch, other's is quality time. My love language is putting things in the garbage. When my kids clean out their room, or a pile magically disappears, or clutter evaporates I'm like the Grinch whose heart grows 3 sizes. I have a dump trailer. You know what I love? When back up to my spot at the dump, that dump raises up and 4,000 lbs of trash slides out the back in 30 seconds. It's so satisfying. It's like magic.

I don't need luxury yachts, I just want no clutter.

But the problem is that I struggle knowing when to keep things. There is actually a time to seek things out, to keep them, preserve them.

About 8 years ago I realized that my truck really didn't work for our family. It's a 3 seater F150, gets horrible gas milage and I can't take more than 2 kids with me. And so I decided to sell it and my dad said, I'll buy it. So I

sold it to him - sort of friends and family deal. He said I could have it back when he died. And I still to this day remember him driving away from my house thinking: what did I just do? That truck is my baby.

And then a couple years later, he kindly gave it back to me. I'm thankful that he had the foresight to keep it. To not get rid of it. There are times to keep.

And there are times to seek.

2 Tim. 2:22: pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace along with those who call on the Lord with a good heart.

Are you pursuing faith and love as hard as you're pursuing a deal on Marketplace?

Are you pursuing peace with the same fervor you're pursuing a good stock to invest in? We should be.

Seek the Lord.

Psalm 9:10: And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you O Lord have not forsaken those who seek you.

Are you seeking the Lord in all that you do? Seeking his will, seeking his word, seeking to walk in his ways? Searching that out?

Maybe life is rough for you **Psalm 17:7:** wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior, of those who seek refuge from their enemies at your right hand.

If you have people who hate you and want the worst from you, seek the Lord. Purse him.

Proverbs 2:1-7: My son, if you receive my words
and treasure up my commandments with you,
making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;
yes, if you call out for insight
and raise your voice for understanding,
if you seek it like silver
and search for it as for hidden treasures,
then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,

If you want wisdom, go get it. God says it's there for the taking and he will give it abundantly. But you have to seek it like silver. How do you get silver? Do you just pray and ask and it falls out of the sky?

No, you got to go where you think it is, you have to use tools, dig a mine and go get it out of the mine by the sweat of your brow. That's often how we pursue wisdom with the Lord. It's hard work. But it's worth it.

Turn to Matthew 6:19-24. I want to show you one last passages in Matthew about our attitude. First is that we need to be careful that money is not our master. **Read 19-24**

So is Jesus saying we don't ever save up for anything? No. But he is saying we need to be careful money isn't our master. Wherever your mind moves to, that's where your master is.

Your eye is how you perceive things. Either in a godly way or in an ungodly way. And if you look at things in an ungodly way it will affect your whole body. Which is why Jesus says: you cannot serve God and money.

But the word isn't actually money - like dollar bills. The word is mammon - which means stuff. Stuff that we have that we perceive as valuable.

Are the things we have in storage, or the things we see garage sales, or the stuff at Harbor Freight, or on Amazon Prime days, or in the attic of our house - are those things controlling us? Are they our master and we're orienting our lives around them? Or Jesus?

Let's make sure it's Jesus.

Pray