

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #117:

“STUFF”

By John Temples

I want to talk to you about your stuff.

You might say, “John, you are getting personal. I thought this was supposed to be ‘Biblical’ Insights.” Well, trust me: “stuff” is a Biblical word--if you use the King James Version Bible (KJV).

The KJV is no longer the most widely sold and read Bible version. The New International Version (NIV) was number one in sales in 2020, followed by the KJV. But if you have never read the KJV, that is truly tragic. According to Wikipedia, the KJV is the most widely printed book in history, and it is unequalled for its dignity and richness of language. It has stood the test of time, having been first published in 1611.¹ Our ancestors used and understood the KJV through many generations. The Restoration preachers learned the truth from the KJV and restored the church of Christ using it. Even if the KJV is not your regular Bible, you should read it.

Understand, though, that being an older Bible translation, the KJV has some quaint, old-fashioned words and expressions. And one of the quaintest of those quaint words is “stuff.” It occurs 16 times in the KJV.

What is stuff? Here are some modern definitions:

- General or unspecified matter or objects
- Things or material of little value
- Any unidentified or vaguely defined substance

Now, “stuff” is a perfectly good word. It’s a very handy “catch-all” descriptor. When we don’t know what to call something, we can call it “stuff.” (“Pillows are filled with soft stuff.”) If your wife brings you your supper, and you are not exactly sure what it is, you can say tactfully, “Honey, this is good stuff--what is it?”

¹ The KJV in use today is actually a 1769 revision of the original.

But 400 years ago when the KJV was translated, “stuff” had a more utile and specific meaning: equipment, clothing, or household goods. In most of its occurrences in the KJV, it means baggage or cooking pots and pans. Still, because of its quaintness, to be reading the lofty language of the KJV and to suddenly encounter the word “stuff” is just a moment of delight and amusement. But there are some real spiritual lessons for us in some of these references to “stuff.” So dust off your KJV and let’s examine some texts where this word is used.

1 SAMUEL 10:22

Israel wanted a king to be like the nations around it. Even though their desire for a king was a rejection of God, He let them have one, choosing Saul the son of Kish. When it came time to anoint Saul as king, Samuel called an assembly of the people. But Saul was nowhere to be found. (At that time, Saul was a modest, humble, shy man who eschewed publicity.) 1 Samuel 10:21-23 says, “When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found. Therefore they inquired of the LORD further, if the man should yet come thither. And the LORD answered, *Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff.* And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward.” My New King James Version (NKJV) reads in verse 22, “There he is, hidden among the equipment.” To me, “equipment” is so bland. “Hidden among the stuff” is so much more expressive and colorful!

Folks, there’s a great lesson here, just crying out to be extracted from this expression “hidden among the stuff.” Today, God is calling people to come to Him and be His people and serve Him, and they have hidden themselves among the stuff! I’m talking about the trifles of this world: money, things, possessions, hobbies, toys, recreation activities, time-frittering things of all types. All these are useful and make life enjoyable, but they can become spiritual hindrances.

Your life is like your closet--it can get cluttered with stuff! And we can then be unavailable or uninterested when the Lord calls us. Jesus spoke of some people who also fit this description in His day, in the parable of the great supper:

“Then said He unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.² So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper” (Luke 14:16-24).

The host in this parable had gone to great trouble and expense to prepare a great feast, and he sent his servant to tell all the invited guests the meal was ready. It was the height of insult to refuse such an invitation, but they all did. Note that each excuse involved things innocent in themselves; but they could, and did, become “stuff”--a hindrance and a distraction from things more important.

The lesson for us is: when the Lord calls, don't let Him find you hidden among the stuff!

LUKE 17:31

In Luke 17, Jesus had been teaching His disciples about the importance of being ready to flee when the Roman armies began to besiege Jerusalem. He was also talking about being ready when He returns. In verse 31, He said: “In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and *his stuff in the house*, let him not come down to take it away; and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back.”

The meaning was, when they saw the Roman armies approaching Jerusalem, there would be no time for people to gather up their “stuff”--their possessions--and

² Well, this last excuse might have some plausibility to it.

try to take them along. How much more will this be true when the last trumpet sounds!

The next verse says, "Remember Lot's wife." When two angels escorted Lot and his family out of Sodom prior to destroying the city, they told them not to look back (don't hesitate or regret leaving or try to take anything with you). Lot's wife did look back, and she became a pillar of salt. She was in love with the "stuff" of Sodom.

GENESIS 45:20

Joseph saved Egypt from famine by storing up grain during seven years of abundant crops. In gratitude, Pharaoh allowed Joseph's family to migrate to Egypt to weather the famine. Pharaoh's instructions to Joseph's family included this: "Also *regard not your stuff*, for the good of all the land of Egypt is yours" (Genesis 45:20). The NKJV reads, "Do not be concerned about your goods."

Again the lesson is: Don't get too attached to or fall in love with the stuff of this world. Be ready to leave it all behind with no regrets when Jesus comes. And really, we won't need to take our "stuff" with us to heaven, will we? God will provide everything we need when we get there!

EXODUS 36:4-7

Exodus 36 describes the building of the tabernacle in the wilderness. The people were so enthused about building it that the following ensued: "And all the wise men, that wrought all the work of the sanctuary, came every man from his work which they made; And they spake unto Moses, saying, The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which the LORD commanded to make. And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. *For the stuff they had was sufficient* for all the work to make it, and too much."

Wow! Moses had to tell the people to stop giving! Have you ever been in a church where the announcement was made, "Please stop giving--we have too much"? Have you ever told your family, "Please don't go to work any more and bring home

any more paychecks--we have too much money"? This certainly doesn't happen often, but it happened in Moses' day.

The lesson for us is, there comes a point when we need to stop pouring money, time, and energy into acquiring THINGS to the neglect of health, family, and our relationship to God. He has promised to give us all the "stuff" we need to live; we therefore don't need to keep up a fiendish pace trying to acquire more and more. Our Lord said, "Therefore take no thought [do not be anxious], saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek: for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:31-33). Paul admonished us that having things ("stuff") sufficient to sustain us, we should be content (1 Timothy 6:8).

So here are some words to live by, tied to this quaint and delightful KJV word "stuff":

- Don't hide among the stuff. Don't get so entangled with the stuff of this life that you have little or no time to serve God.
- Don't fall in love with the stuff of this world; be ready to leave it all behind when Christ returns. Remember Lot's wife.
- Remember God's providence--God knows you need some of the stuff of this world, and He promises to provide it. Don't wear yourself out in a rat-race to acquire more stuff than you could possibly ever need or use.

--John Temples