

TITLE: EMPTY to be FILLED

SERIES: The End of Me (3 of 4)

Text: Acts 9:1-9, 17-20; Philippians 3:4-9

Balboa Community Church

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INTRO

Today we learn about Part 3 of our series called, "The End of Me." Our theme this morning is "EMPTY to be FILLED."

Every Tuesday evening at our house a certain ritual takes place: The "garbage collection." All the trash or recyclables are gathered together, placed in our large trash bins outside, and then wheeled to the curb for collection on Wednesday morning.

We have a smaller sized black trash bin, so sometimes it is filled to the brim. Maybe you have experienced an overflowing trash bin. It happens when you're cleaning out the back yard... or maybe when you're moving and you need to get rid of a lot of things.

What do you do when you walk outside to the trash bin with a bag of garbage and find that the bin is full? Well fortunately, we have a second bin that we can use in the event that the first one is full.

You can't put anything in a trash bin if it is already full.

And today we are going to see that God can't fill your life with Himself if it's already full. God can't fill your life if it's already full.

Before you can be filled by God, you need to be emptied of you. Coming to "the end of me" means emptying yourself of yourself so you can be filled with God.

This can happen in one of 2 ways: 1) Either we are already emptied, or 2) we choose to empty ourselves. Either life does the emptying, or we choose to do it first.

But in either case, there will be an emptying of Me, and when that happens, there can be a filling by God. God loves to fill empty things, and when He does, He does it perfectly.

When everything this world has to offer is gone, leaves you unsatisfied, or never comes in the first place, God is waiting just like He always was to fill you up... to change your course... and to send you out.

In Acts, as the early church begins to grow, we read about a man named Saul who was systematically destroying Christians. He was doing everything in his power to stop this upstart religion in its tracks. His whole life was focused on ridding the world of Christ-followers.

Little did he know that one day, while he was on his way to continue his brutal work of persecuting Christians, he would be emptied of everything he thought he had and filled up with something far better.

Let's look at Saul's story as recorded in Acts Chapter 9.

[Acts 9:1-9]

1. An encounter with Jesus

Here we have the story of Saul encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus, where he was headed to persecute

Christians. Saul's encounter is pretty dramatic: there's a bright light, a loud voice, specific directions. Saul is scared and falls to the ground.

What a dramatic encounter Saul had with Jesus that day. I don't know about you, but I've never met anyone who encountered Jesus quite like that.

But anyone who has become a follower of Jesus has had a personal encounter with Him. Maybe not as dramatic as Saul, but a personal encounter with Jesus is absolutely necessary if one is to become a Christian - or Christ-follower.

I had a personal encounter with Jesus, my Savior. I am one of His followers. And I hope that each person in this room has had an encounter with Christ.

And if we continue on this journey to "The End of Me," we will come face to face with Jesus—whether you literally see and hear Him or not.

Every "empty-to-be-filled" story begins here. Either you meet Jesus because you have nowhere else to turn and He's your last hope. Or you meet Jesus because you've tried everything else in life and are still unsatisfied.

This is what happens when you first become a follower of Jesus - when you encountered Him and realized that you have sinned, you are broken, unsatisfied, and you need a Savior.

This can also happen to a life-long believer who has filled their life with many things over the years, but in doing so has squeezed Jesus to the outer edges of their life.

Whether it's the first time you become a Christ-follower, or you've been a Christian many years, a fresh encounter with Jesus is the beginning of "the end of me." And if you follow His directions from there, it will also be the beginning of real life.

The end of me begins with an encounter with Jesus. Now, let's talk about...

2. Taking out the trash

After Saul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was a totally different person. In fact, his name was changed to Paul. We know him as the Apostle Paul who wrote much of the New Testament. Let's read one of his writings:

[Philippians 3:4-6]

In this passage, Paul talks about the things he used to value before his encounter with Jesus. He lists a lot of external measurements of holiness and achievement. He even talks about his lineage and family heritage. Paul had filled his life with all the desirable traits of a good Jewish man in the first century. He had a lot to be proud of.

But since his encounter with Jesus, he sees everything differently.

Let's continue reading Philippians 3, starting with verse 7.

[Philippians 3:7-9]

Paul says, "I once thought these things were valuable (all my accomplishments), but now I consider them worthless."

So what did Paul do with all the things in his life that he previously thought were valuable?

He said, "I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ."

That's a pretty strong word to use to describe all your life's achievements: Garbage... rubbish... waste.

But Paul feels so strongly about what he used to be filled with that he just calls it garbage.

After he encountered Jesus, Paul had a change of perspective which meant that all the things that used to fill him up were useless, and he knew that he had to take out the trash.

If we want to be filled up by God, then we need to take out our trash. What are the things that define you? What are the things you're the most proud of? What are the things that compete with God for your attention, time, energy, and affection? Taking out that rubbish is crucial if you want God to fill your emptiness.

God cannot fill you if your bin is already full of yourself. You must empty yourself of all the things you think are important or valuable, and then God can fill you.

Now let's see what happened to Paul after he emptied himself. God filled him up...

3. Filled up and sent out

[Acts 9:17-20]

After Paul's blindness is taken away... and after he is baptized into his new way of life following Jesus... he spends a little bit of time with other believers being filled up.

After that, he immediately begins to preach about Jesus. Paul is not just emptied of his past and left alone. He's not just taking out his trash and then sitting around hoping he doesn't accidentally find more trash. Paul gets filled up with the mission of Jesus, and he is sent out to go do it.

When Jesus fills you, He fills you for a purpose. It may feel like you've been empty for so long that Jesus has forgotten you. It may feel like you're too empty and Jesus won't fill you. But He knows your name, and He has a plan for you. He is waiting to send you out to live for Him, filled up by His power and grace.

Ken Mansfield worked with the Beatles and several other very successful musicians. He was living the dream. He had everything the world could offer, but he still felt empty.

Once he was introduced to Jesus and began following Him, Jesus filled Him back up—not with wealth and tour buses and huge houses—but with joy, peace and purpose.

Now Ken travels all over the country sharing his testimony and urging people to empty themselves before they are emptied and find themselves desperate. Here's what he says:

[Video - Sermonette 3]

Never give up. No matter how empty you feel, no matter how long it's been, no matter how far you've run, no matter how much "Me" has taken over—never give up, because God hasn't given up on you.

God is looking for you, running after you, wanting desperately to fill you. But you can only be filled with Him when you're empty of You.

Paul describes this experience of being filled in Ephesians 5:18.

Ephesians 5:18 - Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit. NLT

There are many things that can fill our lives, but God wants us to be filled with the Spirit.

The phrase, "be filled," is in the present, passive, imperative form.

- The IMPERATIVE mode means it is a command - not a suggestion for certain Christians.
- PRESENT tense means it's not a one-time thing, it's ongoing; it's continually being filled day-by-day.
- "Be filled" is also in the PASSIVE voice, meaning that it's something done TO us. It's something we RECEIVE. We don't fill ourselves with Jesus. We come to Him empty and allow HIM to fill us with Himself.

I urge you, no matter where you stand with God, no matter how long you have known God, no matter how many years you have walked with Him -

- 1) Experience a fresh encounter with Jesus
- 2) Empty yourself of all the junk that's accumulated in your life, and...
- 3) Allow Jesus to fill you with His Spirit, empower you for living, and send you out to accomplish His mission.