

"THE REAL LIFE"

FOR SEVERAL SUMMERS, WHILE I WAS IN COLLEGE, I WORKED AT THE J.L. HUDSON COMPANY IN DOWNTOWN DETROIT - THE WORLD'S TALLEST DEPARTMENT STORE.

ONE SUMMER I WORKED AS A STOCKBOY IN SMALL APPLIANCES.

AT THE TIME, MY MOTHER WAS ALSO WORKING THERE - IN SECURITY.

SMALL APPLIANCES WAS ON THE TENTH FLOOR.

THE TENTH FLOOR WAS ALSO WHERE THE SPORTING GOODS DEPARTMENT WAS LOCATED.

AFTER WORK ONE EVENING, MY MOTHER ASKED IF I'D HEARD ABOUT THE EXCITEMENT DURING THE DAY.

I TOLD HER I HADN'T HEARD A THING.

SHE SAID, "GOOD. *THE SECURITY DEPARTMENT WOULD LIKE TO KEEP IT THAT WAY.*"

I ASKED HER WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

APPARENTLY, THE SPORTING GOODS MANAGER CAME BACK FROM LUNCH & ASKED WHO HAD SOLD THE CANOE THAT WAS ON DISPLAY.

NO ONE HAD.

SOMEONE *DID* SEE 2 MEN PICK IT UP & WALK AWAY WITH IT, THOUGH.

THAT WAS CONFIRMED BY SOMEONE ELSE WHO ASSUMED THAT SOMEONE HAD SOLD IT.

THEY RACED AROUND THE DEPARTMENT & THEN THE ENTIRE FLOOR IN SEARCH OF IT.

IF IT WAS THERE, THEY WERE GOING TO SEE IT - IT WAS A CANOE!

THEY FINALLY GAVE UP & CALLED SECURITY.

EMPLOYEES WERE QUESTIONED ON THAT FLOOR & THE ONES BENEATH IT AND, SURE ENOUGH, SEVERAL OF THEM HAD SEEN THE TWO MEN WITH THE CANOE.

THEY EVEN FOUND SOMEONE ON THE FIRST FLOOR WHO HAD SEEN THEM WALK OUT OF THE STORE WITH IT.

OF COURSE NO ONE COULD IDENTIFY THE TWO MEN BECAUSE THE CANOE WAS BEING CARRIED ABOVE THEIR HEADS.

SPORTING GOODS & SECURITY FINALLY HAD TO ACCEPT THE FACT THAT A CANOE HAD BEEN STOLEN - TAKEN FROM THE TENTH FLOOR, DOWN TEN ESCALATORS TO THE FIRST FLOOR & OUT THE DOOR!

SOMETIMES THINGS THAT ARE RIGHT IN FRONT OF US - THINGS THAT ARE SO OBVIOUS - ARE THE MOST DIFFICULT THINGS TO SEE.

THIS TEACHING OF PAUL IN HIS FIRST LETTER TO HIS PROTÉGÉ, TIMOTHY, IS A PRIME EXAMPLE.

WE HEAR THESE WORDS AND WE KNOW THAT WHAT PAUL SAYS IS TRUE.

WE KNOW THAT JESUS TALKED ABOUT MONEY MORE THAN HE TALKED ABOUT ANYTHING WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

IN LUKE'S GOSPEL, JESUS SAID, "A MAN'S LIFE DOES NOT CONSIST IN THE ABUNDANCE OF POSSESSIONS."

EVEN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT WE FIND THIS TRUTH OVER & OVER AGAIN.

FROM THE WRITER OF ECCLESIASTES: "WHOEVER LOVES MONEY NEVER HAS MONEY ENOUGH; WHOEVER LOVES WEALTH IS NEVER SATISFIED WITH HIS INCOME."

WE COULD QUOTE PASSAGES FROM THE BIBLE FROM NOW UNTIL SOMETIME THIS AFTERNOON WHEN YOU'RE ABOUT TO KEEL OVER FROM HUNGER PANGS – PASSAGES THAT CONVEY THIS TRUTH THAT WE ALL KNOW TO BE TRUE.

WE EVEN HAVE OUR OWN MODERN-DAY MAXIMS THAT SPEAK TO IT.

THERE ARE THE WORDS OF THE LATE ART BUCHWALD – "THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE AREN'T THINGS."

WE KNOW ALL THIS TO BE TRUE, AND YET IT'S LIKE THE PEOPLE WHO WATCHED THOSE TWO GUYS CARRYING A CANOE DOWN ESCALATOR AFTER ESCALATOR.

IT SEEMS TO MAKE SENSE SO EVERYTHING MUST BE OKAY.

IT SEEMS TO MAKE SENSE TO TRY TO MOVE UP THE LADDER – THE LADDER OF WEALTH, THE LADDER OF POSITION, THE LADDER OF PRESTIGE.

STARING US IN THE FACE, THOUGH, IS THE REALITY THAT MONEY & STUFF WILL NEVER MAKE US HAPPY.

MONEY & STUFF WILL NEVER PROVIDE US WITH CONTENTMENT.

DID YOU EVER HEAR GEORGE CARLIN'S ROUTINE ON "STUFF?"

HE SAYS, "THE WHOLE MEANING OF LIFE IS TRYING TO FIND A PLACE FOR YOUR STUFF.

THAT'S ALL YOUR HOUSE IS. YOUR HOUSE IS JUST A PLACE FOR YOUR STUFF.

IF YOU DIDN'T HAVE SO MUCH STUFF, YOU WOULDN'T EVEN NEED A HOUSE.

THAT'S ALL YOUR HOUSE IS – IT'S A PILE OF STUFF WITH A COVER ON IT.

YOUR HOUSE IS JUST A PLACE TO KEEP YOUR STUFF WHILE YOU GO OUT & GET MORE STUFF.

NOW SOMETIMES YOU GOTTA MOVE. YOU GOTTA GET A BIGGER HOUSE.

WHY? TOO MUCH STUFF!"

THERE IS A TRAGICALLY ACCURATE BIBLICAL TRUTH SPOKEN BY A HIGHLY UNLIKELY SOURCE!

GEORGE CARLIN SAID, IN THE 20TH CENTURY, THE SAME THING THAT THE APOSTLE PAUL SAID IN THE FIRST CENTURY.

THERE IS ALMOST TOO MUCH IN THESE VERSES TO GRASP.

IT REALLY IS A DEFINED UNIT, THOUGH.

PAUL BEGINS WITH WORDS ABOUT THE DANGERS OF MONEY & POSSESSIONS, THEN MOVES INTO A CHALLENGE TO TIMOTHY TO MAINTAIN HIS COMMITMENT TO CHRIST & THEN HE RETURNS TO FURTHER WARNINGS ABOUT SETTING OUR PRIORITIES IN THE WRONG PLACE.

WITHIN THESE VERSES WE FIND SOME OF THE MOST WELL-KNOWN WORDS OF THE BIBLE.

"...WE BROUGHT NOTHING INTO THE WORLD, SO THAT YOU CAN TAKE NOTHING OUT OF IT."

"...THE LOVE OF MONEY IS A ROOT OF ALL KINDS OF EVIL."

IN THE CENTER OF THESE VERSES, BOOKENDED BY THE WARNINGS AGAINST MONEY, WEALTH, POSSESSIONS & STUFF, IS THE CHALLENGE FROM PAUL TO LIVE IN SUCH A WAY THAT YOU WILL EXPERIENCE “REAL LIFE” AND NOT JUST A FUTILE & FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY & CONTENTMENT.

HE SAYS, “PURSUE RIGHTEOUSNESS, GODLINESS, FAITH, LOVE, ENDURANCE, GENTLENESS.”

THOSE ARE ALL – EVERY ONE OF THEM – GREAT WORDS & GREAT CHRISTIAN CHARACTERISTICS, BUT I THINK THE MOST IMPORTANT WORD IN THAT SENTENCE IS THE FIRST ONE – “PURSUE.”

IT REALLY MEANS TO “RUN AFTER.”

IT MEANS TO CHASE IT AS IF YOUR LIFE DEPENDED ON IT, BECAUSE, IN REALITY, IT DOES.

“REAL LIFE” IS DEPENDENT UPON OUR WILLINGNESS TO DEVELOP A BURNING PASSION FOR “RIGHTEOUSNESS, GODLINESS, FAITH, LOVE, ENDURANCE, GENTLENESS.”

IT’S PRETTY OVERWHELMING, THOUGH, TO THINK OF ALL THOSE THINGS AT ONCE.

MAYBE IT WOULD BE A BETTER IDEA TO TAKE THEM ONE AT A TIME.

IN FACT, I THINK THIS ENTIRE PASSAGE – ALL 14 VERSES – WOULD BE GOOD ONES TO MAKE A COPY OF & STICK IN YOUR WALLET OR BLOW IT UP & MAKE IT A POSTER TO HANG ON YOUR REFRIGERATOR.

IT REMINDS US OF THE FUTILITY OF CHASING AFTER RICHES & WEALTH AND WHAT IT IS THAT MAKES FOR “REAL LIFE.”

DON’T TRY TO DO ALL THOSE THINGS AT ONCE.

MAYBE YOU COULD DESIGNATE A “RIGHTEOUSNESS WEEK” AND FIGURE OUT WHAT THAT MEANS & TRY TO LIVE YOUR LIFE ACCORDINGLY.

THEN MOVE ON TO “GODLINESS WEEK” & THEN “FAITH WEEK,” “LOVE WEEK,” ENDURANCE WEEK” AND “GENTLENESS WEEK.”

PURSUE THEM - RUN AFTER THEM - CHASE AFTER THEM WITH THE SAME GUSTO THAT YOU PREVIOUSLY CHASED AFTER MONEY, WEALTH & POSSESSIONS.

I THINK WE’RE LIVING IN A TIME WHERE NO ONE NEEDS TO BE CONVINCED OF THE TRUTH OF PAUL’S WORDS WHEN HE SAYS, “DO NOT SET YOUR HOPES ON THE UNCERTAINTY OF RICHES...”

IT’S ALMOST LAUGHABLE, ISN’T IT, TO SPEAK OF THE “UNCERTAINTY OF RICHES.”

N. T. WRIGHT REMEMBERS SPEAKING TO A MAN WHO SAID, “WE’D HAVE BEEN ALL RIGHT IF IT HADN’T BEEN FOR THE STOCK MARKET CRASH.”

THIS WAS A WONDERFUL MAN WHO HAD LIVED A FUN, LOVING & EXCITING LIFE.

HE HAD TRAVELED WIDELY, MET LOTS OF INTERESTING PEOPLE, WRITTEN BOOKS, CLIMBED MOUNTAINS & RAISED A LARGE FAMILY.

AND THEN IT HAPPENED.

VIRTUALLY OVERNIGHT, HE’D LOST EVERYTHING.

HE COULDN’T AFFORD HIS SIZABLE HOUSE & WAS HAVING TO MOVE SOMEPLACE SMALLER.

IT'S A STORY THAT'S BEEN REPEATED ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY & ALL ACROSS THE WORLD
COUNTLESS TIMES IN RECENT YEARS.

PAUL WAS SPEAKING OF THE SAME THING 2,000 YEARS AGO – “THE UNCERTAINTY OF RICHES.”

HE CHALLENGES US, HE URGES US, HE BEGS US TO GET OUR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT & RECOGNIZE THAT
“THE REAL LIFE” ISN'T FOUND IN MONEY.

IT'S NOT FOUND IN THE WORLD'S RICHES.

IT'S NOT FOUND IN STUFF.

THE REAL LIFE IS FOUND IN PURSUING, IN CHASING, IN RUNNING AFTER THAT WHICH LASTS.

I THINK MANY OF YOU ARE PROBABLY QUITE FAMILIAR WITH THE PROMISE OF JESUS WHEN HE SAYS, “I
WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU OR FORSAKE YOU.”

IT'S A PROMISE THAT ASSURES US OF SOMETHING THAT WILL LAST – SOMETHING WE CAN ALWAYS
COUNT ON – SOMETHING THAT ISN'T AS ILLUSORY AS “*THE UNCERTAINTY OF RICHES.*”

YOU KNOW THE WORDS & YOU KNOW THE PROMISE.

BUT WHERE ARE THOSE WORDS & THAT PROMISE FOUND?

IT'S NOT IN THE GOSPELS.

IT'S IN THE 13TH CHAPTER OF HEBREWS.

I THINK IT'S INTERESTING THAT WE FIND THAT PROMISE IN THE LAST HALF OF THE 5TH VERSE.

WHEN YOU HEAR THE *ENTIRE* VERSE, IT GIVES THAT PROMISE A DIFFERENT FEEL.

“*KEEP YOUR LIVES FREE FROM THE LOVE OF MONEY, AND BE CONTENT WITH WHAT YOU HAVE; FOR HE HAS
SAID, 'I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU OR FORSAKE YOU.'*”

DON'T PURSUE OR CHASE AFTER OR RUN AFTER MONEY, POSSESSIONS, WEALTH & STUFF.

THAT'S NOT WHERE REAL LIFE IS FOUND.

THE UNCERTAINTY OF RICHES IS MATCHED BY THE CERTAINTY OF THE PROMISE OF CHRIST – THE
CERTAINTY THAT HE WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU OR FORSAKE YOU.

IT'S A PROMISE THAT ASSURES YOU OF REAL LIFE. AMEN.

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