

Precious Silver

For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined.

Psalm 66:1

Sometimes it's easy to miss the value of things. I was painfully aware of this recently after an estate sale of my mother's belongings. After the sale I received my share of the proceeds and planned to deposit the lump sum in the bank. So I handed the teller an envelope of cash that included a few large coins tucked in alongside some other bills. Not paying close attention, I just assumed they were ordinary, recently minted dollar coins. I never really liked these modern dollar pieces because I tend to mistake them as quarters and don't know how many I've unwittingly passed along as such. So on this occasion I was glad to credit our bank account with their face values (\$4) in addition to the other money in the envelope.

A few weeks later, I discovered I'd made a huge mistake. Consistent with my usual cognitive difficulties about dollar coins, I misjudged the pieces in that envelope. They weren't recently minted legal tender generated from the estate sale as I thought, but 4 vintage silver dollars my mother saved. Some were even passed along from my grandfather when my sister and I were kids. These pieces with all their sentimental worth were gone in a flash, not to mention their value as solid-silver collectibles.

So how could I make such a blunder? The truth was that I simply overlooked the silver dollars lying in the envelope next to the wad of bills. After months of sifting through mountains of memorabilia with questionable value, I grew weary of searching for family treasures. Nonetheless, my oversight shows how easily stuff can vanish. A fleeting instant of careless distraction is all it takes to lose things forever, regardless of how important they might be.

Of course there are things much more important in life than a few lost dollars. Even so, I kick myself at overlooking them because they meant something to me. Now in the case of sentimental keepsakes, I'm sure the sting of this incident burnishes on me an indelible lesson that I need to pay closer attention to details in the future lest I again fail to see and consequently lose meaningful things.

More significantly, this episode illustrates the need for spiritual vigilance lest I overlook eternal treasures to be gained. A host of them are found in His Word that contains everything needed for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). But spiritual pearls don't lay openly exposed to the world; neither are they forced upon anyone. Rather, Jesus said, seek and you will find (Mathew 7:7), and He rewards those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). The jackpot to be sought lies within the Scriptures, the Mind of Christ. Yet inheriting spiritual wealth isn't a random event like winning the lotto, although in this world it might seem as rare. Instead it depends on what our heart loves best, and there are only two options for first place: 1) God or 2) something else. God's Word brings life and a lighted path; without it there's only a dark road obscured by blindness.

Furthermore, without spiritual perception we miss real treasures, kind of like how I missed those silver dollars because my distracted eyes saw but didn't perceive. Though I'm still smarting from that, I miss infinitely more when spiritually distracted from God. Even if I were to gain the whole world, it's no substitute for peace and contentment, or faith that hopes beyond this fleeting world. After all, who but our Creator really knows how to satisfy us, His creation? Though He gives us all things richly to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17), it's not what we do or don't possess that matters, but how tightly we cling to these gifts rather than the Giver. Misplaced priorities don't necessarily mean overt debauchery; they can simply mean a wrong attitude about something otherwise good that we've placed at enmity with God by valuing it above Him.

What we treasure becomes apparent upon suffering loss. Of course an empty bank account is no fun, but will we faint and crumble when money slips away? It's natural to grieve the loss of loved ones, but will we weep and wail as those without hope? And nobody wants ill health, but will we be like Job's wife who retorted, "curse God and die (Job 2:9)?"

When I lose something, a natural response might be to ask, "Why, God?" Yet I should probably also ask myself, *Why do I question God?* Could it be because I value something above Him and the sufficiency of His grace? Of course losses can hurt and elicit honest cries to our Heavenly Father; even Job cried out to Him amidst great pain. But through the agony he never cursed God, instead he declared, "though He slay me yet will I trust Him (Job 13:15)." While Job lost much, his spiritual wealth remained because his faith endured. So ultimately Job gained even more, but he never lost the best (Job 42:10-17).

The glorious purposes of God include transforming us into His image (2 Corinthians 3:18). This process includes refinement to make our character pure like precious metal passed through fire. When this happens we lose something unwanted, the dross that causes spiritual dullness. That we won't miss, because when it's removed, our character shines and reflects the image of Jesus to the world.

I still wish I hadn't overlooked those dollar coins, but thankfully we all inherit infinitely more when seeking a character that outshines pure silver.

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