



FAITH IN THAT NOT SEEN

JESUS NEVER MADE IT EASY. In fact, He was a pretty hard sell. During His time on earth He was not remotely a practitioner of political correctness, letting people off the hook simply because they *meant* well. Jesus called things as He saw them, no matter the audience, and one of the most hilarious moments in all of Scripture is when Jesus coldly reprimands some scribes and Pharisees who have challenged the behavior of His disciples in not washing their hands before eating lunch.

And He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?"

"You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you:
'This people honors Me with their lips,
But their heart is far away from Me.
But in vain do they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'"

Matthew 15:3,7-9

After the Jewish leaders had left (presumably in a huff) Jesus' disciples sidled up to Him—one can just picture them talking out of the side of their mouths as they glance over their shoulders—to gently reprimand their hopelessly rude Master.

Then the disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?"

Matthew 15:12

No! Really?



Jesus never missed an opportunity to set people straight about the importance of going beyond the *mechanics* of the Law to the fullness of God's heart. On another occasion Jesus again dispensed more hard truth.

A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." When Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Luke 18:18-22

Here again the Savior took the essentials of the Law, and instead of removing the burden of integrity, added to it. It wasn't enough for people to keep the old commandments, he told the wealthy man. It wasn't enough for them to be honest and forthright, not cheating or stealing from their neighbors.

Jesus said to the man that he must shift his priority to things eternal. The treasures of this earth are nothing compared to the untold wealth of heaven, but he must first turn his heart away from temporal gain. More than that, to acquire these eternal riches he must, in fact, renounce all desire for wealth. Alas, the shortsighted ruler wasn't willing to take a chance on the unseen.

But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.

Luke 18:23

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“And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”

Matthew 13:22-23

Earthly riches are called thorns, as well they may; for as thorns, they pierce both head and heart; the head with cares in getting them, and the heart with grief in parting with them.

Thomas Brooks

There is no one more intently focused on earthly riches than the thief. He is profoundly shortsighted, since he has no determination or patience to support himself by more honorable means. But so too the one of modest means who may not be a thief, but is preoccupied with his penury. The Christian who takes pride in his poverty is as guilty as the thief; he is no less preoccupied with the “thorns” of wealth, and, caught in his fixation, he steals from his Lord. For his heart is not set on Him.

Whatever form our “treasure in heaven” may take, we can be assured that it is of a kind and quantity far surpassing whatever we can imagine. But whatever it is, we chip away at it by holding too tightly our treasure on earth. Those who cling to what they have now (or cling persistently to the dream of having more) demonstrate a decided lack of faith in what awaits them in eternity future.

And thus they set themselves a far distance from heaven.

○ Lord, I am ashamed to seek Thy Face
As tho' I loved Thee as Thy saints love Thee:
Yet turn from those Thy lovers, look on me,
Disgrace me not with uttermost disgrace;
But pour on me ungracious, pour Thy grace
To purge my heart and bid my will go free,
Till I too taste Thy hidden Sweetness, see
Thy hidden Beauty in the holy place.
○ Thou Who callest sinners to repent,
Call me Thy sinner unto penitence,
For many sins grant me the greater love:
Set me above the waterfloods, above
Devil and shifting world and fleshly sense,
Thy Mercy's all-amazing monument.

Christina Rossetti

