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MUSINGS 3

Every now and then I come up with some brilliant insight that I think will make a great article. Then I find that, brilliant as it is, I can't expand it to fit even my shortest article length. What I need to do, every now and then, is to write an article full of several unrelated thoughts. This will be one of those times.

Humility is a virtue. It is good to be humble. After all, God "forgetteth not the cry of the humble." (Ps 9:12) Solomon said, "A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit." (Prov 29:23) "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." (Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5) (James and Peter both appear to be quoting a single source, although no other scripture can be found that says this. Perhaps they are quoting something they heard Jesus say or a quote from some other rabbi.)

Because humility is so important we look down on the glory-seeking person. Surely it is wrong to seek glory and honor for yourself. We don't like the "hot dog" on the sports field, the teacher's pet, or the gold-digger. Yet Paul tells us God rewards those who seek glory and honor. God "will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life." (Rom 2:6-7)

Perhaps the difference here is from whom we seek the glory. If we seek it from men, then when we get it we have our reward. But when we seek glory and immortality from God, by doing what will make us like God, then he rewards us with eternal life.

Does this mean that we should make a show of humility just so God can reward us? Jesus did say, "whoever humbles himself will be exalted." James said, "Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and he will lift you up." (Jas 4:10) It is almost as if they are saying that if you seek to be truly exalted you have to act as if that isn't what you want. Maybe God knows what so many of us who are actors know; the action is the parent of the emotion. If we play at being humble God will exalt us, because it will soon become part of our nature.

A man was given a medal for being humble, but they had to take it back because he wore it. God's reward for humility is not like that. He wants us to wear it for eternity.

I am not a carpenter. I "measure twice, cut once" and it still doesn't fit. I wouldn't know a rip saw from a crosscut saw by sight. As far as I am concerned a finish nail is a nail that comes from Finland. (Sorry, that would be a Finnish nail.) When my brother-in-law was building his house, my job was to pound nails back up because I could do the least harm that way.

As such a carpenter, I am not known for hitting the nail on the head. Hammers and pain seem to go together. That said, I have to admit that I don't really remember the last time I hit my finger with a hammer. That is because the pain doesn't last. In the overall scheme of things, the pain from hitting my thumb is a mere pin-prick. So it will be with this life from the view of eternity. What seems so long and painful now will seem as nothing in heaven. It will be just like hitting the nail on the hand.

In many of the old movie or TV westerns the main characters would get themselves into a tight spot. It may be that they were surrounded by Indians or by bandits. They were fighting off the attackers, but were almost out of ammunition. All looked hopeless. Just at the last moment before they were killed or carried off you would hear a bugle call, and up would ride the cavalry to save the day.

We were held captive by sin. "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped." (Ps 73:2) Then, off in the distance we heard the bugle. "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son." (Gal 4:3-4) At the right moment we were saved, not by the cavalry but by Calvary.

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TTTAWDD

I once read the following story, supposedly true, in the Reader's Digest. David and his wife were cleaning out the garage when David came upon a box marked TTTAWDD in his wife's handwriting. The box was sealed, and he couldn't tell what was in it. So David asked his wife what was in the box. She couldn't remember, so they decided to open it. After cutting the tape they opened it and found all of David's sports trophies. Then the wife said, "Now I remember what that stood for! TTTAWDD means Things To Throw Away When David Dies."

We all have things to throw away when we die. Many things are of value only to us, and not even to our spouses. The old saying says "you can't take it with you." How true that is. What are some of the things we value that we will leave behind for the trash heap?

Fame

In the above story, David would leave behind his prestige or fame. He was good at sports. He was a proven winner. But that fame will die with him. Even before he dies his fame was boxed away, out of sight. The gunfighters of the American west knew that there would always, eventually, be someone faster on the draw. Fame

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was only as good as your last gunfight. We give prizes of gold, silver, and bronze today. In the ancient Greek games the prize was a laurel wreath. It is said that this was chosen because it would wither and fall apart in a matter of days, reminding the victor that fame is fleeting. Even the gold medals won't last. This is why Paul talks about the difference between this crown and our ultimate reward.

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. (1 Cor 9:24-25)

Wealth

Jesus tells us that wealth is as temporary, however much we may have. It could last as little as a night.

The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:16-21)

A more recent parable tells of a rich man who, for some reason, succeeded in making a deal with God. He convinced God to allow him to take something with him when he died, but God limited it to one large suitcase. The man died and shows up at the pearly gates dragging one very large and very heavy suitcase. At the gate, Saint Peter stops him and tells him he can come in, but he will have to leave the suitcase behind. The man explains the deal he made. Saint Peter disappears for a short while, then comes back with confirmation of the man's story. He has to let the suitcase in. But before the man goes through the gates, Peter admits to a certain curiosity. In heaven, all that a good man could want is available. Even the gates are made of pearl. What could the man possibly want to bring into heaven from earth? So he asks the man to open the suitcase. Inside, the man has his earthly wealth converted into several bars of the finest gold. When he sees this, Peter scratches his head. "I can understand," he says, "wanting to bring some things from your former life. I might have had something I wanted to bring with me, too. But tell me this. Why bring paving stones?"

What we consider valuable wealth, we might as well leave behind. And we might not even make it that far. Go to the men who had much on October 28, 1929. What happened to their wealth the very next day? Find the person who had a nice nest-egg in Enron stock. What has he now but bitterness and toil? What of the day trader who has "traded a week's wages for six more years of work?" Even if we leave it behind for others, how long before "our" wealth is on some trash heap?

Things

Americans are obsessed with things. This is independent of wealth. Many things we keep have no real value. For instance, in my garage are many boxes. Some of those boxes have not been opened since we moved into this house nine years ago. In fact, I know of one box that

was sealed over thirty years ago. On the box are tags from at least five moving companies as we have moved this box around the country at least nine times. What is so important in this box? Is it gold, or money, or anything else of value. No. Years ago we clipped a box full of magazine articles to read “someday.” Those articles have followed us, unopened and unread, for thirty years. (At least it will make it easier to throw it all out when I get around to it.) The things we collect and keep have nothing to do with wealth. We keep them just because of who we are and what they might mean to us.

One of the fastest growing businesses in America is the small storage unit industry. Real estate brokers have made fortunes by developing properties as storage units. This is because the American obsession with things goes beyond value, or even function. We are so “thing” oriented that it doesn’t matter if we never even see the things we hoard. We are willing to pay hundreds of dollars a month just to keep a lot of stuff that we will never use or even look at.

Granted, some things might be functional. It is almost essential in many places to own a car, or even two. Some people own three, or four, or more, and rarely drive more than one. A television is considered essential in some homes. Therefore, some people have a television in every room, including the bathroom and the doghouse. Some sports fanatics even put two or three in a room so they can watch more than one game at a time.

There is nothing, in itself, wrong with owning things. There is nothing wrong with owning a lot of things. The problem comes when we let our things take over our lives. When the things we want exceed the things we need we may begin to resent it when God does not provide the excess. We should expect only what we need, and then we will be grateful to God for the excess. “Therefore take no thought, 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.” (Matt 6:31-33) We should always be aware of the letters on that box. “THINGS to throw away.” These things are only here a short while. We should think more of the eternal. “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.” (2 Pet 3:11)

Knowledge

Some of us are proud of what we have learned, and perhaps rightly so. We have gathered trivia, ephemera, and maybe even something important from our studies. Some people pass that knowledge on through

writing. But in the end, even this is vanity. What we know dies with us. What we pass on lasts only a short while.

The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. (Eccl 12:10-12)

We hope that we pass on knowledge and wisdom to at least our children. We can never pass it all on. Instead, the preacher concludes, we must “fear God, and keep his commandments.” Anything else will be thrown away when we die.

What lasts

If there are things that will get thrown away when we die, there are also things that will last. Someone once said that you can’t take it with you, but you can send it ahead.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break

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through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matt 6:19-21)

What are the treasures we can place in heaven? Really, they are the same treasures that will remain on earth. Shakespeare had Marc Antony say, “The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones.” (*Julius Caesar*, III, ii, 80-1) He was wrong. What really remains is the good that we do. People may remember the evil that men do, but they are more willing and more likely to keep the good. Of what value is it to keep a grudge with someone who is dead? (Or even with someone who is living?) We are happy, though, to remember the good qualities of those we love. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” (Gal 5:22-23) There may be no law against these things, but they are certainly things that people will remember about us. They are the TTKWDD—Things To Keep When David Dies.

DEAD MAN WALKING

It is the stuff that horror stories are made of. A bunch of people are dead and buried. Then somebody sees one of them on the street. Soon they are all terrorizing the town. The walking dead are outside the house. They want to make you one of them. But you don't want to die. You know the story. It is "The Night of the Living Dead." Or there are the other stories—the vampires, the ghosts, or the zombies. Few people really believe the dead are walking among us, but many are afraid that they could. In truth it happens every day, and it really isn't that scary.

The living dead are really good people. They don't terrorize anyone, although they do sometimes try to make you one of them. Look, is that one of them sitting next to you at the restaurant? Did one check you out at the grocery store? Is your doctor one of the living dead? They are everywhere. They are Christians.

Christians are truly dead people. They have died and been buried, yet they continue to live.

How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:2-4)

What does it mean to be one of the living dead? Paul says one essential of being one of these people is that they don't live like they used to. They don't breathe like they used to. They don't walk like they used to. In some of the movies you know the living dead because they walk with stiff legs and arms. With the Christians they don't walk in sin. This doesn't

mean they can't sin. It doesn't mean they don't sin. It just means that they don't practice it. If the only way to get to Carnegie Hall is "practice, practice, practice," a Christian will never make it to the Carnegie Hall of sin.

The other thing it means is that these living dead are the only ones that are truly alive. "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." (Rom 6:5)

Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom 6:9-11)

It seems that those who are alive to sin are dead forever, but those who are dead to sin are alive eternally. When one dies and is buried, they rise to die no more. If "a coward dies a thousand deaths; the brave man dies but once," then the same is more true for Christians. Instead of dying every time we sin, each sin is covered. Each death is eliminated. Death is no longer king; God is.

Wherever there are Christians, somebody can quote the line from the movie, *The Sixth Sense*, "I see dead people." In the movies, the living dead attack the other people. The others run, screaming, from them. The real dead people, though, are the ones others want to be like. Yes, some will want to remain in sin, and run from them. But many will decide that it is better to be the undead. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matt 5:16)

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