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IS IT TRUE WE CAN'T TAKE IT WITH US?

By Robert J. Tamasy

Occasionally we hear the cliché, “You can’t take it with you.” The implication is that on the day we pass from this life, we will not be taking suitcases filled with our belongings. No moving van will be following the hearse. Following the death of a wealthy, internationally famous entrepreneur, when asked how much the businessman had left behind, a company spokesman accurately responded, “All of it!”

Strangely, however, often we do not act as if that is true. Many of us accrue as many material things as our incomes allow. For some people this means multiple homes, numerous cars, closets filled with attire that could clothe entire villages in Third World countries, expensive vacations, enough gizmos and gadgets to occupy several lifetimes. We fret over investment portfolios, agonizing when returns drop and rejoicing (temporarily) when they soar.

Yet, upon taking our final breath, everything we have amassed remains behind, left perhaps to family members and loved ones, or even to the government in the form of inheritance taxes. So if in reality we can’t take it with us, why does our behavior make it appear we think otherwise?

This is not to say material things – TVs, cell phones, computers, houses, various forms of transportation, shirts and skirts and slacks, books, boats, even bowling balls – are inherently wrong. But if they demand our full attention and devotion, it might be good to re-examine our priorities and passions. We find a decidedly different perspective on “stuff” in the Bible, one worthy of our consideration:

Material possessions make a poor master. We can use the things we possess as tools, or servants, enabling us to do the good things we have the opportunity to perform. Or they can become objects of worship, consuming our time, talent and energy. Jesus said, *“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the others. You cannot serve both God and Money”* (Matthew 6:24).

Material possessions demand our affections. Having enough money in our bank accounts is not bad, unless we have trouble defining what “enough” means. Too many people, however, have been driven by their obsession with bank balances and bottom lines, at the expense of deserving people around them. This is one reason Jesus said, *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:19-21). What did He mean by “treasures in heaven”?

Material possessions are never enough. How many people have you met who have sincerely stated, “I have everything I need. I never want another thing”? Probably not many people, if any at all. In answer to the question, “How much is enough?”, most of us if we were honest would reply, “Just a little bit more.”

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About this Israel's King Solomon, reputed to be the wisest man who ever lived, wrote, *"Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.... As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them.... Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand"* (Ecclesiastes 5:10-15).

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. When someone says, "You can't take it with you," or something to that effect, what comes to your mind?

2. How would you describe the degree of importance or priority that money and material possessions have for your life?

3. Have you known someone whose excessive focus on wealth and acquiring material things worked to their detriment? What did you observe about their life?

4. Armed with the knowledge and awareness that no matter how much we acquire in this life, we will not be able to take any of it with us after we die, how should that change our attitudes and actions toward the things we own – so that they do not "own" us? How can we, as Jesus said, "store up treasures in heaven"?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 11:4, 11:18,25, 28, 15:6, 18:11, 19:4,17; Ecclesiastes 2:10-11, 4:8, 9:7-10

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