

# Dollar Signs and Sins

Bubba Garner

The devil doesn't give up. If he sees something isn't working, he will quickly find another area of enticement. I know that James assures us, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jam. 4:7), but don't fool yourself into thinking he will run very far away. Even when Jesus resisted every temptation in the wilderness, we are told that Satan left Him "until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). As soon as you defeat him on one side, you best prepare for his second attack on the other.

After the Lord refused to turn the stones to bread, the devil led Him up "a very high mountain" (Matt. 4:8) and showed Him "all the kingdoms of the world in a moment in time" (Luke 4:5). He promised Jesus that He could have all of their wealth and glory if He would just fall down and worship him. While it is true that God is in control of all, Jesus Himself refers to Satan as the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31), implying that he possesses great influence and power in this realm. He had the authority to give Jesus the keys to his kingdom, a chance to rule in the affairs of men.

But again, Jesus was equal to the task. "It is written," He said, "You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only" (Luke 4:8). Jesus came to earth not to serve Himself but to be a servant. His mission was to do His Father's will, to be obedient to a plan that included suffering and death. The devil's temptation involved taking a shortcut to glory, having a crown without having to endure a cross. But he was offering Jesus something that His Father had promised Him long ago—"the nations" as His inheritance and "the very ends of the earth" as His possession (Psa. 2:8). All the riches of the world could not compare with this joy that was set before Him.

How fitting that this same Jesus would later ask, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul" (Matt. 16:26)? He had the opportunity to make that very transaction, to take hold of the present at the expense of the future. But Jesus kept His concentration where we usually become distracted. He could see that it wasn't worth the price.

You can't afford to lose your focus. One of the biggest dangers of materialism is that it takes our eyes off of what is most important. It can start subtly, with an innocent glance at the bank statement or stock market. Then before you know it, all of your attention and energy are in things that are here with nothing leftover to invest in the hereafter. Like Jesus, our focus should always be on the crown that is to come. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21).

You can't afford to lose your faith. The Bible nowhere states that it is impossible for a rich man to go heaven. But it does indicate that there are certain snares attached to wealth. "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix

their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). Money can cause us to become self-reliant and independent, placing our confidence in things that are fragile and easily lost. Our currency may boast "In God We Trust," but our assurance is not always in Him who blessed us with it. The domain and glory of all the kingdoms of the world were not enough to cause Jesus to abandon His faith. I'm afraid we give ours up for far less than that.

You can't afford to lose your salvation. Your soul is the only thing you possess that will live forever. Your house will eventually fall, your clothes will wear out, your things will rust. But your soul is eternal, that which will return to God who gave it (Eccl. 12:7). It was valuable enough to Him that He sent His Son to suffer and die for it. So, what will you give in exchange for it? A new job, a second car, a retirement home? Don't be tempted by such a cheap price tag.

Idolatry did not die with the Old Law. God's people can worship gold as surely as they did the golden calf. They can make mammon their master as easily as they did Baal. To flee from it, we would do well to remember the words of Jesus in the wilderness. "You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only." Nothing makes more sense.