Behold, My Stuff!

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It's not often that superhero movies cause me to have moments of deep reflection, but recently I found myself quite challenged by a character in one. This particular character wasn't even the main character. He wasn't even a superhero. He was simply a warrior of a city built on a mountain who had been promoted to a position of great honour and given the responsibility to be the guardian of the gatehouse. He was also given the special task of announcing the arrival of the superhero, the prince of the city! Unfortunately, this guardian wasn't quite as noble as his predecessor. The gatehouse was not only the doorway to the city but the bridge to many civilisations beyond. Having access over the bridge to all these civilisations, he abused his position and collected valuable items and trinkets. Rather than the guardhouse being a place of strength and preparation welcoming people with dignity, it was filled with his loot. As the character so proudly boasts while trying to impress some visitors to the guardhouse, "*Behold, my stuff!*".

You might wonder, with good reason, where I might possibly find deep reflection in such a nonsensical story. However, it struck me that there are rather too many uncomfortable parallels between this character and our own stories.

Enjoying My Stuff

Just as the warrior could see the many civilisations over the bridge, we are surrounded by many cultures and nations. All of them promise us various kinds of riches: wealth, health and prosperity. They may even offer things that we don't immediately think of as riches but will still enrich our lives, such as safety, security, relationships and quality of life. We don't even need to look to other nations to see what the world can offer us. We need only to walk into a mall or turn on the TV, and we are bombarded with offers promising to make us feel better, happier or healthier if we just purchase their product or service.

Of course, there isn't anything inherently wrong with buying something that might taste nice, feel nice, help us do something or feel healthier or fitter. In the book of Ecclesiastes chapter 8 verse 15 (NIV), the writer tells us that God has given us things on the earth to enjoy, "*So I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them*

under the sun."

If we work hard then we should get to enjoy the reward of that hard work, and that's not a bad thing. However, if we belong to God, we know that these things we enjoy are not lasting. In fact, Jesus tells us that whatever we might have on earth is worthless compared to our eternal treasure in heaven, *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal."* Matthew 6:19-20 (NIV)

Those around us who aren't storing up heavenly treasures may be obsessed with gathering and enjoying earthly things, but that is because they are citizens of the nations of this world. We are not! We are called to something much greater. Hebrews 11:13-16 (NIV) talks of many warriors of the faith and the legacy they were waiting for, "*All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."* This is our calling! If we love God, then we don't want to hold on to the things of the world around us.

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Suddenly, the lure of the things that the shop windows and the TV promise us fade away. They may seem to have value here on earth, but they are nothing compared to what the city of the living God can offer us! We are called to be the church of the Firstborn – Jesus – and our names are written in heaven itself. Somehow though, even though we know this, we find it all too easy to get so caught up in what the world is pushing in front of us that we lose sight of our true calling.

As I write this, Black Friday is just around the corner. The malls will open, and many will resemble a feeding frenzy as shoppers run in to grab the best deals and fill their trolleys with as much stuff as they can cram in. And online stores will crash with the sheer number of people rushing to fill their baskets and get exclusive one-day offers.

And then there is us. Maybe we were hoping to grab a bargain on Black Friday, or perhaps we are saving for something we really want. That might not be a bad thing in itself, but do we really want to be part of this feeding frenzy? God has called us to stand at the gatehouse of the city of God. As the church of Jesus, we are the representatives of His Kingdom here on earth.

Announcing the Prince's Arrival

Just like the warrior in the movie had a special additional task assigned to him, so do we. We are to announce the arrival in the heavenly city of its Prince of Peace! Acts 2:32-33 (NIV) speaks of Him, *"God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear."*

This is our incredible task – to testify that Jesus is the Firstborn from the dead and the Ruler of the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:5). He has ascended into His heavenly city and will be returning in glory! There is nothing in us that we have done to deserve this incredible honour, but it is in God's love and grace that He chooses us to be His heralds to the world around, to shout out the good news of His saving power.

Decisions About My Stuff

If God gives us things to enjoy, but we aren't to be caught up in the things of the world, then this can sometimes leave us with tricky decisions to make. Maybe we want to buy something, like a new car or a house, or do something for our health. Perhaps it's a life decision like moving to a better-paid job or moving overseas. Or it could be something much smaller, like just getting a new phone or renewing a gym membership. There could be a Black Friday bargain that really caught our eye! What should we do with these things? Should we spend money on them?

To answer that, we have to ask ourselves another question; has my stuff become too precious to me? If it has, that is where your treasure is. And, as Jesus says in Matthew 6:21 (NIV), *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

> has my stuff become too precious to me?

This is not an issue of 'things'. This is an issue of the heart. Can we use and enjoy the things we have without cluttering the gatehouse of our lives and getting in the way of our primary duty – to announce the upcoming arrival of the Prince of Peace? Or do we want all these things just because it's "my stuff"? Our hearts should belong to Jesus, but are we being distracted? Is our heart striving for things that aren't of God? Sometimes, it's hard for us even to know what our own motives are! As it says in Jeremiah 17:9, "*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"*

If we aren't sure of the wisdom of purchasing something, we can always ask someone. There is freedom in accountability and liberty when we are sure our heart is in the right place, and we can *really* enjoy the things God gives us when we can do so without any feelings of guilt or regret!

Black Friday will come and go, but there will always be voices in the world whispering in our ears to be dissatisfied with what we have. If we look around, we can see the lure of the riches of the nations all around us. Are we ready instead to announce the Good News of Jesus? Or are we cluttering our lives with worthless loot, boasting with our lives, "Behold, my stuff!"?

Another Recommended Read: *Money, Possessions and Eternity by Randy Alcorn.*
