

Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



February 4, 2018

Winning and Losing

In a world that measures winning in material terms, it takes a radical mindset to view success using an entirely different set of criteria.

"There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This is vanity, and it is an evil affliction" (Eccl. 6:1-2).



Donald Savastano, a construction worker in Sydney, New York, recently won a million dollar scratch lottery. Naturally, this windfall transformed his outlook on his future. "I'm probably going to go get a new truck and . . . probably go on vacation," he said when he collected his check. His new wealth also allowed him to pay a visit to the doctor, since he was not feeling too well.

Less than three weeks later, Mr. Savastano was dead from advanced brain and lung cancer.

I don't know who will inherit this man's fortune. But at this point, does it really matter? He won the lottery, but lost his life, and now the money means absolutely nothing to him.

Life is unfair, and stories like this reinforce that bitter truth. We work hard to accumulate more and more of this world's goods, with no guarantee that we will live to enjoy it. Even if we live a long life, death will eventually overtake us and separate us from everything we've gathered. In the end, no matter what else happens, we will lose it all.

Why does the pursuit of wealth blind us to this stark truth? Jesus identified the problem when a man requested that He intervene in an inheritance dispute with his brother (Lk. 12:13-21). This man had his eyes set on gaining control of the family fortune—and was even willing to blow up his family, if necessary, to get it. Jesus declined to get involved, and issued a stern warning to him and anyone else who would listen: "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (v. 15). This man's root problem was not a recalcitrant brother, but covetousness in his own heart. He was obsessed with something that one day he would have to leave behind for others to fight over.

Covetousness always warps our ability to see reality. It leads us to view success strictly in terms of monetary gain. More esoteric values, like generosity, service, compassion, hospitality, and so forth, get sacrificed on the altar of mammon. By concentrating our attention on material things, we convince ourselves that we're on our way to winning the jackpot in life.

Except life doesn't work that way. Wealth is an illusion, an insidious con artist that draws our attention in one direction while robbing us of what's truly important in another. Only too late do we realize we've been swindled. Solomon pegged it correctly: "this is vanity . . . an evil affliction."

Whether we win or lose in life is not measured by our physical holdings. That's a losing hand, guaranteed. Life's purpose lies elsewhere, in using whatever resources we've been given to help and serve others. There's nothing glamorous about this lifestyle, but in the end, we'll appreciate the investment we made in this heavenly treasure. *That* is a winning strategy worth pursuing.

— David King



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