

Trinkets, and

Trash...



Treasures

By John McLean

Late in 2010, Australia experienced the worst floods in its history, followed by cyclones, while other parts of the country have had devastating bushfires. Property has been destroyed, homes ruined, lives have been lost. We have witnessed surges of water hurling cars as if they were toys, washing some houses away, wrecking others, uprooting trees, destroying roads, railway lines, and bridges. It has been tragic, sad, and heartbreaking.

Yet in the midst of it all, we have also seen amazing courage, selflessness, cooperation, and service. People standing in the midst of their ruined homes, facing the loss of possessions, valuables, and the work of a life-time have smiled, cried, smiled again, and said that life goes on. They have pitched in to help strangers and communities. Neighbours who had previously had only a nodding acquaintance with one another cleared muck from one another's homes together. The 'Mud Army' of volunteers embodied the spirit that rose in response to the challenge presented by this devastating natural calamity.

In a crisis, we know, deep down, that people matter more than things. Indeed, at such times it seems we can be clear and certain that family,

friends, mateship, community, and helping one another are the things that really matter.

Terry Sweetman, writing in the *Sunday Mail* (16 January 2011), after describing his own experience with the Brisbane flood, expressed it cogently: 'Materially we are briefly impoverished. Spiritually we are enriched—now and forever. In exchange for some trinkets and trash devoured by flood waters, we have found some treasures we have forgotten existed....My pledge is that we will never again neglect the garden of friendship from which we have harvested so much kindness'.

In the Sermon on the Mount, probably the best known of Jesus' teaching, Jesus makes the observation that life is more than possessions and eating and drinking. He isn't saying that eating and drinking and our material possessions are unimportant, just that there is more to life than these things. He isn't condemning working, earning, going into business, saving, building a house. He is saying that there is more to life than these things.

Deep down, we know this to be true. In times of crisis, the distractions and details of everyday life, the tyranny of the urgent and the pressures of the present seem to fall away and we see, just that much more clearly, just how true it is—life is more than things. What really matters are our relationships.

God is a relational Being. He is love. And deep down in the human heart

there is a need for friendship, fellowship, relationship—a need for love. We know it. We get so busy we forget it, or so distracted by the teeming trivia of life that we are not conscious of it, but we know it to be true.

The story of the Bible is not about a harsh, judgmental God who can't wait to smite us. It's about a God who reveals himself in Jesus as one who endures all the reality of human life along with us—its ups and downs, pain and celebrations. It's about a God who loves us, and in his grace wants to share his life with us. It's good news in the midst of all the bad news.

Scientists tell us that we are at our happiest when we are helping others. Interesting, isn't it? Not when we are busy accumulating, acquiring, defending, and protecting the 'stuff' of life. When Jesus encourages us to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, he is talking about our focus, our priorities in life. And then he says we won't need to worry about all the other stuff—it will be provided.

He is telling us how to simplify the complexities in life—by prioritising the things that really matter.

If life is truly more than material trinkets and trash, why do we spend so much time and effort dedicated to their pursuit? If the treasure of life is spiritual, relational, why not make that our focus and priority? And at the heart of this is the treasure of a relationship with God. 'Your Father

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has been pleased to give you the kingdom', Jesus said (Luke 12:32).

The kingdom is relational—sharing the life of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Through Jesus, we share in this life, and in this righteousness. (It's not a matter of working harder to become more righteous by ourselves; it's participating in the righteousness of

Christ.) No wonder Jesus' repeated admonition here is 'don't be overly anxious', or simply, 'don't worry'.

If our priorities are spiritual, kingdom-focused, we can get on with life, a life of love and service. Through his incarnation (becoming one of us), Jesus has redeemed all of life, so we can by all means enjoy the physical while we have it. But at the same time we can set our hearts on the imperishable,

the permanent, the eternal. Life is more than stuff, possessions. It's about people, grace, kindness, and love. It's about enjoying relationship with God and one another. Why wait for a crisis?

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