



Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association

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PRICE TAGS

You justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. —Luke 16:15.

This printed message is based on a sermon I preached a few weeks ago at our local church. As I explained at that time, there is often an untold story behind a sermon. In this case I told how in the fall of 1959, as a young preacher, I held a four-week revival meeting in Lubbock, Texas.

Fond memories of that time include meeting and becoming friends with Jim Westbrook. Being a gifted preacher, musician, and singer, it was a blessing indeed when he came to California the following summer—1960—and we held revival meetings together in the San Joaquin Valley. We have kept in touch and both look back to those meetings as unique and special. It was during that time he met his wife Ann who has been a wonderful asset to his ministry over the years. Together they have pastored churches in several states and now reside in Deming, New Mexico.

One of Jim's sermons back in 1960 was called "Price Tags." So, going back all these years, I chose this title and began my message with what was Jim's opening story:

A large department store in a Midwestern city advertized it would be having a sale of all sales. During the night before the big sale, some boys broke into the store undetected. They did not steal anything—they just changed the price tags! Things of a low value, were given a high price tag; things of high value were marked low.

This was long ago, and precise details are not known to me now. But imagine a television set for \$3 or a refrigerator for \$5! At the other extreme, imagine a cheap ball point pen with a \$495 price tag! While some customers were grabbing up bargains, others, seeing the ridiculous prices, were stomping out mad! There was total chaos and confusion. It then became apparent: *Someone had changed the price tags!*

So is it in this world: Satan has changed the price tags. There are things that worldly people think are of great value that may amount to nothing, especially in the light of eternity.

Things that are important in God's sight, on the other hand, the world may ridicule as having no value—things like church attendance, prayer, Bible study, and living a Christian life.

There are things that are "highly esteemed" by men that are an "abomination" in the sight of God! Fortunately we can get out *God's Price List*—the Bible—and determine the *true* value.

Things are not always as they seem. Looks can be deceiving. Cases of mistaken identity provide interesting examples:

Back in the early '60s when I was still living in Riverside, I was helping an elderly lady my mother would often pick up and take to church. She was moving to a different apartment, and because she received assistance from the County, a social worker was involved. During our conversation he told me this story:

Driving to Palm Springs for an appointment—with no GPS in those days—he stopped at a real estate office to ask directions. He saw a man in the office that he thought looked like Dean Martin. He said to him, "You look a lot like Dean Martin." The man turned his face sideways, and said, "It's the profile; I hear that quite often." It still did not occur to him that this was *indeed* Dean Martin! It was not until a subsequent stop at that real estate office he learned this!

Years ago I met a Christian man in Riverside who looked a lot like Oral Roberts. The company he worked for sent him to different cities. He told me he once was walking along a sidewalk in a city when a man on the other side of the street spotted him, ran across the street to greet him, thinking he was Oral Roberts!

In a recent tragic news story, a couple was hired to murder a certain woman (involved in a love triangle). But because of mistaken identity, the woman they spotted in a store and later killed, was not the intended woman!

I suppose if everyone who ever lived could be pictured in a computer, there would be someone, somewhere, at some time, who looked nearly like any one of us. Some twins look so much alike it is difficult to tell one from the other.

The best-known twins mentioned in the Bible are Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25:22-26). Though they were "womb-mates"

(pun intended), the Scriptures indicate that they did not resemble one another in appearance or actions.

Evidently Thomas, Jesus' disciple, was a twin. The name Thomas means *ōtwinō* in Aramaic, a common language at the time. We are also told he was called Didymus, a Greek word meaning *ōtwinō* (John 11:16; 20:24; 21:2). But just who his twin was, is not specifically mentioned.

To illustrate that things are not always as they seem, consider these geographical oddities:

We would assume that Los Angeles is further west than Reno, Nevada. Actually Reno is further west! In other words, if a person traveled due south from Reno, when he passed Los Angeles, he would be west of it!

It would not seem that any portion of Canada could be as far south as California, but it is! The southernmost point of Canada is Middle Island in Lake Erie. If one were to go due west from there, he would cross California, just *south* of the Oregon border!

Not far from Palm Springs, there is a large area of land that is below sea level, a portion of which is occupied by the largest body of water within the State of California: the Salton Sea. Just to the east of that is Calipatria. At 184 feet below sea level, it is considered the lowest town in the Western Hemisphere. In order for their American flag to fly *above* sea level, the town erected a flagpole 184 feet high in the town square! Though it is no longer the *tallest* flagpole in the United States, the elevation of its flag at the top could be called the *lowestō* if figured by *sea level*.

At an elevation of 29,029 feet, Mount Everest is the tallest mountain in the worldō but only if figured from *sea level*. Mount Mauna Kea in Hawaiiō though 13,796 feet above sea levelō is actually 33,480 feet tall if figured *from its base*. It is the tallest mountain in the world!

God said through the prophet Isaiah, *ōMy thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways....For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughtsō* (Isa. 55:8, 9).

ōThe natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discernedō (1 Cor. 2:14).

Twice we read in the book of Proverbs: *ōThere is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of deathō* (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

The Laodicean church (Rev. 3:15-17) said, *ōI am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothingō!* But Jesus said: *ōYou are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.ō What a contrast!* Their lukewarm condition was so sickening, Jesus said, *ōI will vomit you out of my mouth.ō* I am reminded of an old John R. Rice sermon title: *Church Members that Make God Sick!*

Jesus gave a parable about a man who sowed *wheat* in his field, but while men slept an enemy sowed *tares* among the wheat (Matt. 13:24-30). A note in one of my study Bibles says:

ōTares closely resemble wheat, but are poisonous to human beings. They are indistinguishable from wheat until the final fruit appears. Farmers would weed out tares just before the wheat harvest.ō

Appearances can be deceiving. Even *Satan* appears as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14).

A woman (or man) might be beautiful *outwardly*, but rotten on the *inside*. The world puts emphasis on *outward* fleshly things, whereas God looks on the *inside*. It is *ōthe hidden person of the heart....a meek and quiet spirit that is in the sight of the Lord of great price”* (1 Peter 3:4).

Years ago after preaching in Modesto, California, a man shook my hand and said, *ōBrother Woodrow, you are looking at the ugliest man in the world.ō* I did not argue the pointō I don't suppose he was actually the ugliest! But, it would be better to be the ugliest man in the world and be saved, than to be the best-looking man and be lost.

Worldly minded people think of laying up treasures on earth, but Jesus said to *ōlay up for yourselves treasures in heaven”* (Matt. 6:19, 20).

When I brought this message on *ōPrice Tagsō* a few weeks ago, we sang a gospel song many of us have known for years:

*This world is not my home,
I'm just passing through,
My treasures are laid up,
somewhere beyond the blue...*

I recall the words of a pastor who was speaking at a conference in Texas: *ōI have never received a large salary in the ministry,ō he said, *ōbut my job has a great retirement planō it is out of this world!”* Amen.*

James described some as *ōthe poor* of this world,ō but who were *“rich in faith”* (James 2:5). While it is not our purpose to glorify poverty, still this poses a question: Which would be better: to be rich in this world, but poor in faithō or the other way around?

For those who believe in Christ, to be rich in *faith* is of great value! It pleases God (Heb. 11:6). Faith can make a way when there seems to be no way; faith dares when reason would compromise and surrender! And so it is, *ōwe walk by faith, not by sight....for the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal”* (2 Cor. 5:7; 4:18).

One life will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last. *ōHelp us, Lord, to get the PRICE TAGS of our lives in their proper place!ō*

—RW

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