



Where does our treasure lie?

Is it in our traditions, or in God?

Every family has some kind of family treasure.

For some it may be a Christening gown, passed down from generation to generation.

For others it may be a silver service, a piece of jewelry, or some family heirloom.

Our family treasure was a \$5.00 gold coin.

Minted shortly after the Civil War, it had been passed on from great-grandfather to my grandfather to my father. My daddy kept it in a little wooden matchbox, wrapped in string, hidden in the back of his big safe in his office.

On occasions he would let me open the safe, take out the box, untie the string, and peer at the shining gold coin nestled in the yellowed cotton. No one was allowed to touch it for fear of tarnish.

That gold piece survived more than a century of hardship. It stayed in the safe during the great gold recall of the Depression. When thieves broke through the roof of my father's office they missed the gold coin in the wooden matchbox. It was as if God himself were protecting it—preserving it as He had the traditions of the church—so it could be passed along to future generations.

On my 25th birthday, in a little ceremony in our home, my father passed the family treasure along to me. For years I left it in his safe. Then, shortly before he died, I transferred it to our safe-deposit box. On occasion I would take my children with me into the vault at the bank where we would look, reverently, at the family treasure.

Then last year, when our oldest son Bruce turned 25, I decided it was time to release the family treasure into his hands. In a little ceremony at the house, I related how it had come down to us through hardship, trial and suffering. Now, in what seemed to be an almost sacred moment, we placed the gold coin in his hands.

There were some tears. Some rejoicing. The exchange had been made. The treasure was still in the family.

Shortly afterwards Bruce called me on the phone. He had read an article in a national magazine on rare coins. Our particular gold coin—at least one like it—was listed as having great value. According to the magazine \$5.00 gold coins like ours

were worth \$1,925 if they were in reasonable condition.

Reasonable? Our coin was just as it had come from the mint. It had never been touched but by gloved fingers. For a century and a quarter it had rested in that little wooden matchbox, surrounded by cotton—protected by the blood of the Buckinghams. It had never spent a day in anyone's pocketbook, much less rattling around some man's pocket with common coins.

It was the family treasure.

Practicality prevailed. I gave Bruce patriarchal permission to sell the coin while the price of gold was up.

Bruce took off from work the next day to drive to a neighboring city where the state's finest rare coin expert had a shop. That evening he returned.

"Guess what, Dad," he said with crestfallen face. "The coin is *counterfeit*."

The coin expert said there were lots of counterfeit coins minted at the close of the Civil War. I told Bruce to get two more

liefs and if the denomination received them, good. If they were rejected, to go in peace.

"There are few things sadder," the professor wrote, "than the person who jettisons all the old ecclesiastical baggage of denominationalism only to find they now have a pervading sense of rootlessness."

That is sad. But it only indicates the individual never had his roots in God to begin with—only in his denomination.

So much of what we have cherished over the years—our precious traditions, our liturgy, our ecclesiastical treasures—need to be exposed to the light. The mere fact a thing has lasted a long time does not make it genuine.

My son said, "Dad, that coin was worth a lot more to our family before we had it checked by an expert."

True. But I'm glad I didn't wait until I really needed \$1,925 before we sold the coin.

I remember the 84-year-old woman who

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opinions. He did. Both confirmed the earlier report. The family treasure was worthless.

Well, not quite worthless. It did contain a trace of gold so it was worth a few dollars. But nothing like the 400 times the original value we thought it was worth.

All those years of caring, protecting, preserving and defending the family treasure—only to find it was worthless.

I wonder how many of the other treasures we hang on to would prove to be junk if exposed to the light of truth.

A theology professor wrote me recently, offended that I had suggested to a couple that they should leave their denomination. Actually, I did not advise them to leave the denomination. I advised them to use the same procedure used by the apostles in the first century. To boldly speak their be-

wrote me after having read my biography of Kathryn Kuhlman, *Daughter of Destiny*. She was upset, saying it would have been better had I not told the truth. As a result of my book she said, she had lost her salvation.

I wrote her back saying she had reason to praise the Lord. At least she now knew she was lost.

Much of what we hold on to is worthless—and in the end may let us down.

The psalmist did not say he was homesick for the old-time pentecostal camp-meetings. Nor was he homesick for his denomination. Nor was he homesick for his rosary. He wasn't even homesick for his Bible.

"My heart," he said, "is homesick for the courts of God."

That's where our real treasure lies. <