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Unsearchable Riches

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Joel tilted the chair in his study backward and, folding his hands across his broad chest, he closed his eyes. It was good to be home, he mused in pleasant thought; good, too, to hear the varied sounds of Muriel's busy hands at work in the kitchen preparing the evening meal.

Recalling his busy day, Joel sighed in tired but satisfied contentment. The life of a pastor was certainly not one of quiet and ease, nor even of schedule though each day he outlined and made one. More often than not, however, his daily schedule was interrupted by some emergency needing his instant and immediate attention.

But this was what God had called and prepared him for, he thought, recalling the night when he died out fully and completely to his own desires and worldly ambitions and plans and was filled with God's divine love, cleansed and made pure and holy in heart.

The cozy warmth in the comfortable, well-organized study made him drowsy. He must have dozed, for when next he opened his eyes, it was to see Muriel's face. She was bending over him, calling his name softly and tenderly, informing him that supper was ready.

"Well, well," he commented, springing out of the chair. "I must have dozed."

"And good it was for you, too," Muriel replied. "You look revived and refreshed, Joel."



"The inference being that I looked 'wilted,' I gather." Muriel laughed and linked her arm through Joel's as they hurried to the kitchen. "Not wilted, dear, in the full sense of the word," she answered, "but tired. You did look tired, Joel. Another busy day, I suppose?"

"Busy but rewarding," Joel replied, taking his place at the head of the table.

"Rewarding!" Steve exploded, from his place at the table. "How can you say that, Dad? All you and Mother are doing is wearing your bodies out for a bunch of ingrates, a... a people who could care less what happens to you. All they think about is self. 'Pastor,' he mimicked, 'I need you; Junior has a stomach-ache.' Or, 'Oh, Pastor, my Susie and Polly are out of sorts with each other again; maybe, if you talked to Polly's mother...' "

"That's enough!" Joel exclaimed emphatically and with authority, looking sternly at his oldest child.

"Please, Dad, let me say just this, then I'll stop," Steve said between set jaws. "I'm sick and tired of having things said about me in school that aren't true. Anita Purley makes it pretty nasty for Lois Ann and me. She has a tongue like her mother -- sharp as a new double-edge razor blade. She's cocky like her father and as bold and brazen, too. I'm fed up with being pushed around, maligned, accused and lied upon by her. And don't you forget what I'm saying Dad; she uses her sharp slanderous tongue to good advantage for her family -- against you! Because of her and her family, Lois Ann and I won't get to go to that young people's meeting; but that doesn't mean I'm not going to fight back."

"Steve!" Lois Ann exclaimed, bursting into tears. "Don't talk like.., that."

Joel felt suddenly weak. Never had he seen nor heard his son look or talk in this manner. Fear clutched his heart, constricting it in tight-fisted knots. "Steve," he said brokenly, softly, reaching his hand across the table and placing it over his son's, "you never gain by retaliating. Never. 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.' "

Steve's lips trembled and quivered. He hadn't meant to hurt his father. He hadn't! He loved him too much to deliberately wound him, but his seeming passive attitude toward the Purleys was more than his own seething soul could tolerate right now. In his own heart he had torn the Purleys to pieces many times, devising secret means and methods by which to bring about their demise. Not so with his father; he had remained a faithful, loving, kind and tender shepherd to them in spite of their unholy undermining methods and techniques in trying to get rid of him.

"If you knew everything, Dad . . . their shrewd little seeming innocent schemes, their behind-the-back barbs, the slander and..."

" 'Vengeance is mine . . . ' " Joel repeated kindly. "The Purleys are in God's hands, Son. My duty is to be faithful to their souls in loving them and in proclaiming the word of God; the rest is up to God. Now, let us pray, and be thankful for our wonderful home and for this bountiful meal, prepared so tastefully and attractively by your dear mother and sister. And, Steve, my advice to you is, get alone somewhere and do business with God before you do something that can never be undone or made right. Jesus said that one who hated his brother was a murderer."

Steve ate in silence; inside, he was boiling. Anita Purley's insinuate that he broke the glass out of Crestview High's front door was just too much. She knew he hadn't done it; yes, she did; but she would do all in her power to make him look bad in the eyes of Mr. Hurless, the principal. Well, this was one time she had used her razor-sharp tongue once too often, he mused in silent anger and contemplative thought.

As he headed for his room when the meal was finished, a train of events and circumstances paraded before Steve -- things concerning the Purleys and his father's early ministry in Crestview.

When Joel Aaron arrived with his family in the picturesque town to assume the duties of the church, the Purleys had full control. Charlie Purley made no pretense about the fact. A tall, muscular man in his early forties, with prematurely gray hair and piercing black eyes, he was Sunday School Superintendent, church treasurer and sole boss of whatever (if anything) got done for or around the church. Along with Mrs. Purley . . . and in the presence of the entire Aaron family . . . Charlie flatly declared that he and his family would positively and absolutely not tolerate any changes whatever, trying (Steve was sure) to intimidate his father and "tone his messages down," a thing most unlikely and unthinkable where Joel Aaron was concerned. He was a God-fearing, fearless preacher and a true man of God; this Steve knew with all certainty.

The church was in a sad state of affairs, Steve recalled: the attendance was down, the finances even lower, and the "spiritual index factor" was lower still. And then God sent a revival...

At thought of the revival, Steve wilted. He remembered hearing his father's agonizing praying . . . his pleading with God... to send a spiritual awakening to his flock at any cost. And God had heard and answered; Holy Ghost conviction seized family after family and, in deep contrition of heart and soul, along with true repentance, confession and restitution, they were genuinely converted and sanctified wholly. Church attendance grew steadily; fire from Heaven fell in service after service; and the Purleys were soon replaced by Spirit-filled lay people holding offices in the church.

Remembering the revival now and the many good people in the church, Steve's heart smote him for classifying all of them as ingrates. In reality, many of his father's parishioners were some of the finest, most wonderful people he had ever met.

Feeling utterly humiliated, he rushed downstairs and outside, wanting desperately to "get even" with Anita Purley but afraid of the consequences. He felt torn in two -- part of him conniving, scheming and planning the down-fall of the Purleys -- Anita especially-the other part fearful of the judgments of God upon his soul, plus the "reaping" of his wicked sowing.

Going past the church, Steve heard a familiar voice calling earnestly upon God for help. Drawn like a magnet and feeling all soft and crumbly inside, he raced up the three steps and was soon in the vestibule.

His father neither heard nor saw when the swinging doors opened into the church sanctuary, so impassioned was his praying and interceding. Not until Steve's hands gripped his father's shoulder did Joel Aaron open his eyes.

"Steve! Steve!" he cried, sobbing as if his heart would break. "You can't lose your soul; you can't! Not over the Purleys, nor anybody!"

Flinging himself into his father's open arms, Steve's broad shoulders shook with weeping. "I . . . I'm sorry... I hurt you, Dad; forgive me!" he pleaded. "I guess I didn't realize how terrible a monster I had in my heart. But I can't help myself, Dad; a part of me drives me to get even with that troublemaking, lying Anita. It... it's frightening..."

Brokenly, and with tears streaming down his cheeks, Joel said, "It is something to be frightened over, Son. The carnal mind 'is not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can be;' much less to you. Nothing but the dynamic power of the Holy Ghost can get rid of this evil thing. But you need to repent and do your first work over; God cannot -- will not -- live in a heart filled with hatred and ill will."

"I know, and that's why I'm here; I want to get back to God. I've never had anything in my heart like this hatred and bitterness that I've felt for Anita since she accused me of breaking the window out at school and insinuated as much to Mr. Hurless and..."

"It's been in your heart all the time, Steve," Joel interrupted softly-kind. "It just took Anita's false accusation and her subtle machinations to keep you from going to that young people's meeting in Brookhaven to bring it to the surface. Carnality is treacherous-deadly, too. Oh, Steve, Steve, you must get rid of it or it will get rid of you. Let's pray..."

It was well past the midnight hour when Steve and his father entered the front door of the parsonage, the long hours of earnest praying and seeking compensatory in every way. Steve was genuinely and soundly converted, seeking and obtaining the purging, cleansing fire of Pentecost following his glorious first-work experience.

"I see there's been a change!" Muriel said joyously, meeting her son as he stepped into the living room. "God has answered our prayers."

"Mom, you should have gone to bed," Steve remonstrated lightly, throwing his arms around her neck. "But I'm glad you're still up... I got saved and sanctified. Oh, I'm so happy. Every vile and evil thought and feeling toward Anita is gone. I now feel sorry for her; terribly sorry; and I'm going to pray for her. ' "

"I have hot chocolate and cookies waiting for you," Muriel told the pair. "Let's go to the kitchen."

Over cups of steaming hot chocolate, Joel said, "Steve, I want you to always remember one thing..."

"Yes? What is it, Dad?"

"Take thought of 'the unsearchable riches' of Christ . . . those 'better' things that will never fade away nor tarnish with using. You have often wondered why your grandfather is no longer in the ministry; now I'll tell you."

Steve felt his mouth go suddenly dry; his spittle felt like cotton. He wanted to know, but he dreaded knowing.

His eyes met those of his father; a look of pain registered in their deep pools of blue.

"Don't feel you must tell me, Dad," he said quickly. "It... it'll only hurt you more."

Squaring his shoulders and facing his seventeen-year-old son, Joel Aaron began, "Your grandfather is a writer, as you know..."

"And what a writer!" Steve exclaimed. "That last book of his is super-super."

Joel sighed. Turning the cup round and round in the saucer, he replied tiredly, "That's been the way with every book he's written and published; they've all been super -- too super, to be frank and honest. You see, Steve, we were small -- Helen, Ellen, Mark and I -- when your grandfather wrote his first book. It all began when he felt he wanted to give his family a few of the better things of life; things his small church couldn't afford in the parsonage. I was seven; Helen and Ellen were eight, and Mark was ten. We were invited to Aunt Mary and Uncle Will's home for Easter. Oh, how we wanted to go! But there was no extra money for the 60 mile train fare. This grieved my father terribly that he couldn't afford to bestow upon us so simple a luxury as a first train ride. With tears in his eyes he promised us that, God willing, by another year he'd have enough money to give us that much-desired train ride.

"Night after night he worked in his little study, writing, correcting, adding to or changing the lines for his first book and mailing the completed manuscript to a publishing company a few months later.

"The advance royalties from that first book sent us on the train to our Aunt and Uncle. Beside that, it paid for a much-needed washing machine for mother and a different car for dad. Soon a second book followed -- a sequel to the first -- then another, and another, each a tremendous success and best seller.

"By now he became a figure of the platform more than of the pulpit. For, growing in popularity, there were constant demands upon his time . . . engagements in which to speak to business people of prominence, affluence and notoriety. There was no lack of money now. We had 'things' in abundance. He found a career successful in the eyes of the world and it totally obsessed and possessed him. But he forgot about the most important things..."

"You . . . you mean he gave up preaching?" Steve asked, interrupting the sentence as incredulity registered on his face

"Exactly, Steve. He said it was too much to be a minister of the gospel and a successful writer, too. He chose the latter, moving us into an affluent neighborhood and devoting all his time to writing."

Tears surfaced, then rolled down the youth's ruddy cheeks. Excusing himself, he hurried up the stairs to his bedroom to pray. The pain in his heart was too deep for more words.

Entering his room and dropping to his knees, he realized how near he had come to messing up his own life and turning his back on the "unsearchable riches."

Brokenly, he began to weep and pray.

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THE END