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**Proverbs 11:4, NLT.**

*<sup>4</sup> Riches won't help on the day of judgment,  
but right living can save you from death.*

**Revelations.**

Have you ever been looking at luggage on Amazon, and then a few days later, you are reading an article maybe on cnn.com and ads for Samsonite pop up? That's called targeted advertising. Online merchants buy and sell information about the things that you look at on the web; this information is used to put up ads that are specifically intended to match your buying habits and your web search history. The folks on cnn.com know that you were shopping for luggage on Amazon. Yes, this is very spooky, and we are being manipulated. Recently, I was reading an article on abcnews.com; the story was called "*As Sudan war rages, country's health system nears breaking point.*" Here is something from that article:

*Data from Sudan's Doctor Trade Union says that 70% of health care services are no longer functioning due to lack of supplies, personnel and access. Twenty-one hospitals have been forcibly evacuated by militants. And 17 hospitals have suffered aerial or land bombings, with nine ambulances attacked. A video filmed by an eyewitness on May 15 shows smoke billowing from the East Nile Hospital in Bahri, Khartoum.*

The article goes on to quote an official from Doctors Without Borders as saying:

*"After the looting of one of our medical warehouses in Khartoum, fridges were unplugged and medicines removed. The entire cold chain was ruined so the medicines are spoiled and can't be used to treat anyone."*

The story was accompanied by numerous photos of dilapidated, bombed out, and looted hospital facilities. The point of the article is that one of the casualties of civil war in Sudan is a complete breakdown of the medical system. As I was reading this article, the targeted advertising software cleverly displayed, right in the middle of this article, an ad meant specifically for me. It was trying to get me to buy the *"Sleekest Virtual Reality Headset"* ever made, and soon to be available from apple.com, for about \$3,500. Let me ask you a question. How callous would I have to be to click on that ad and start shopping right then and there for this virtual reality headset? How many people would be able to instantly turn away from this horrific story of human suffering and start looking at the latest high tech, super-expensive gaming toy? How cold and self-centered are we?

No, I did not click on the ad. But it made me think of Proverb 11:4:

*<sup>4</sup> Riches won't help on the day of judgment,  
but right living can save you from death.*

There is a misconception among a lot of Christians, and that is that God's judgment doesn't come until we die. The truth is that we are being judged all the time. We can die a spiritual death at any time. The big difference is that while we

are still alive, we will have the opportunity to not die an *eternal* spiritual death. But the more damage we do to our connection with God, the harder it is to reestablish that connection. There is an ancient story that is widely believed. It says that the Roman Emperor Constantine waited until he knew he was on his death bed before being baptized so that he could live a life of total indulgence as long as possible and then get his soul cleansed at the absolute end. We know that it doesn't work that way, that we spend a lifetime forging a strong connection with God. We only very slowly learn to model our lives on the life of Jesus.

Here is something from the Book of Judges, Chapter 2:

*<sup>6</sup>When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. <sup>7</sup>And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the LORD had done for Israel. <sup>8</sup>And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110 years. <sup>9</sup>And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. <sup>10</sup>And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.*

The Book of Judges tells us about the story of the People of God from the time they settle in Canaan – Israel – to the birth of Samuel, which covers about 600 years. Remember that Moses dies just before they enter the Promised Land. Joshua takes command. Early in Judges we learn that initially, the People of God

have only been partially successful in conquering Canaan. In our quote, Joshua is ordering the people to go out and inhabit the land. Then Joshua dies. This marks the end of the generation that knew Moses, that entered Canaan. We are told this about the generation that follows: *And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.*

The next generation did not follow in the spiritual footsteps of their ancestors. They chose to pursue a different life – and many of them decided to worship the pagan gods of the Canaanites. The chain of faith becomes broken and people who did not know Joshua are raised ignorant of the ways of God.

Here is a passage from Romans, Chapter 1.

*<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

Paul is telling the believers in Rome that God will hold people who do evil accountable. He says that the nature of God has been revealed to all people,

since the beginning of creation. There is, in truth, no excuse, he is saying, for not answering the call of God's grace. People chose of their own free will to not honor God, and instead chose to darken their hearts. They thought they were wiser than God, that they knew better than God's ways, and instead of worshipping their creator, they chose to worship the things of this world.

Which is it when people act in a selfish way? When they are cruel to others? Are they ignorant or are they arrogant? In many ways, to people of faith, there is no difference. The point here is that arrogance and ignorance seem to come together when it comes to faith. People who are arrogant and act in ways that are harmful to others, who live in a fashion that is very much unlike the way in which Jesus lived, they are ignorant of God. And people who are ignorant of God typically can't help themselves: they adopt evil beliefs and practices.

I am not saying that it would have been cruel or sinful for me to click on that ad in the middle of an article about the people of Sudan suffering in a war zone and having absolutely no access to even minimal medical care. But it would have been an ignorant thing to do, an arrogant thing to do. That's what our society wants us to do, that is the belief system they want us to have. It pushes us closer to making even worse decisions, ones that are indeed cruel and sinful.

Retailers in major cities across the nation, both big box chain stores and small mom and pop stores, are reporting an astonishing surge in large scale shoplifting. People walk into stores and brazenly take whatever they want, filling their arms or shopping carts, and march out. They don't bother to conceal what they are doing. They don't run. They know they are being videoed and they don't care. They just walk out. They know that employees have been told to not try to stop them. It's causing drug stores to lock up household items like razors, curling irons, electric razors - even toothpaste. There are stores that are closing. After I read the article about medical treatment in Sudan, I read an article about a small consignment store that had to close due to shoplifting losses. This was a business with a tiny staff, a tiny profit margin, one that sells used goods for people. Nobody can argue that the people who walked in there and took what they wanted were only stealing from big corporations that can afford the losses.

People who do these things do not know God. They are arrogant and they are ignorant. Thinking they are what is important, and that other people are below them, and not understanding what it means to know God – this leads them to not trust God to lead them through life. But what is the opposite of this? What is on the other end of the spectrum from ignorance and arrogance? It's knowledge and humility and trust. Here is the entirety of Psalm 131:

- <sup>1</sup> *O LORD, my heart is not lifted up;  
my eyes are not raised too high;  
I do not occupy myself with things  
too great and too marvelous for me.*
- <sup>2</sup> *But I have calmed and quieted my soul,  
like a weaned child with its mother;  
like a weaned child is my soul within me.*
- <sup>3</sup> *O Israel, hope in the LORD  
from this time forth and forevermore.*

This Psalm tells us something very important: Yes, we need to know about God, about our faith, about the Scriptures. But knowledge must come intertwined with humility. This Psalm was one of fifteen so-called *Songs of Ascent*. Most likely, this Psalm was sung by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem to observe the various Jewish festivals, like Passover, which did call for an uphill climb into Jerusalem. It is also called a *Psalm of Trust*. The Psalmist is anything but proud and haughty, and pilgrims would have been singing this to put themselves in the right frame of mind to meet God in the Temple in Jerusalem. The psalmist does not lift their heart up too high and does not raise their eyes too high. This is a sign of humility. The psalmist then uses the relationship between a mother and her baby to describe their deep trust in God. Now, the psalmist, in humility and trust, is ready to come before God and deepen their knowledge. I have been careful to not refer to the psalmist, the author of 131, as “he”. That’s

because many people believe that this psalm was written by a woman. But we will, of course, never know for sure.

There is a reason why we need to trust in God and be humble when we seek knowledge. There is much that we'll never know, but that God knows. I believe that a key reason why so many people today reject God is that part of having faith means acknowledging that we can indeed work hard on our arrogance – but we will never make much progress on our ignorance, at least compared to God. Still, we should celebrate what God does tells us, instead of hiding from the fact that God is so much more knowledgeable than us. In Deuteronomy Chapter 29, verse 29, these are the words of Moses: <sup>29</sup> *“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”* This is a very powerful verse. Moses delivers this to his people just before he dies, just before they cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. He's telling them that on one hand, there is so much that we will never understand while we are on this Earth. But we should be joyful at what God *does* reveal to us.

I believe this should be the bottom line for all of us. We should abandon our arrogance, our ignorance, and our lack of trust in God. We should remember that God will easily reveal to us the knowledge that we need to live according to



the ways of Jesus Christ. If we come before God in humility and in trust, we will have all the knowledge that we truly need to know. We should already know most of what we need to know, but we're too busy ignoring the pain of others and clicking on ads for \$3500 virtual reality headsets, too busy putting our personal desires above the needs of others. It's a lesson that, as a person who has always been in love with cars and technology, I must keep reminding myself of. I did not click on that ad for that VR headset. But I came very close to doing so, to shutting my mind off from the sorrows of the people of Sudan and joyously reading the details of a new piece of novel and powerful hardware.

Here's one last piece of Scripture. It's Proverb 25:2, and it tells us that God elevates us by allowing us to explore and deepen our own faith:

*<sup>2</sup> It is the glory of God to conceal things,  
but the glory of kings is to search things out.*

God does want us to explore our faith, to be inquisitive, to gain knowledge. We are not to be meek and stupid. We do indeed need to learn. We do it through Scripture and through prayer, and by the daily practice of deliberately emulating the life of Christ when we deal with others – and this is hard to do. There is a lot of trial and error involved in deepening our faith.

The heart of a Christian is humble. We don't hold ourselves above others. And while we often are forced to question our faith in individual people, our trust in God is unwavering. When we go before God, we're not looking for advanced calculus lessons, a literary interpretation of *War and Peace*, or a better understanding of the War of 1812. That's not the kind of knowledge we need. We're looking to heighten our sense of God's presence, of the Holy Spirit within us. We're looking to translate some abstract notion of God's grace into a tangible sense of security. We're looking to turn prayer into something that has a response that we can feel. We're looking to wake up each day in joy because we finally and deeply realize that God is very real - and we are indeed made in the image of God. The Book of Revelation is called Revelation after the first word that appears in the Book in its original Greek, which is *apokalypsis*. *Apokalypsis* means "to unveil". God is waiting to unveil for each of us the incredible truths of our faith. That's the knowledge we want – and that we can easily obtain.

Please pray briefly with me.

*God, help us abandon arrogance, ignorance, and our mistrust of you. Lead us toward humility, knowledge, and a deep trust in you. Help us use every day of our life to add to the secrets that you are more than happy to reveal to us. Amen.*