

Where Thieves Break in and Steal

By Patrick Swayne

Last Sunday night, sometime in the hours of the night or early morning, a thief entered my car. After checking a couple of compartments in the front (which were left open), he or she grabbed my collection of coupons and coffee stamp cards (along with a few dollars) which had been stuffed into the coin tray of my center console. The thief then probably noticed that I had left my laptop bag in the back seat, and, taking that, fled without taking anything else, leaving the front door slightly open.

When I came out in the morning and saw my door slightly open, I assumed that I had failed to close it and was thankful that the battery wasn't dead; we were planning on leaving for an overnight trip to Talkeetna, as Monday and Tuesday are my "off" days for the summer. I didn't notice even after entering the car that two compartments were open. After we were about an hour down the road, I noticed my missing coupons and blamed my wife (sorry!). It was then that I put two and two together, and realized that someone had entered the car. A few more miles down the road, and it hit me: I couldn't remember bringing in my laptop the night before.

After I spent a sleepless night in Talkeetna (partially due to worry and partially due to the fact that the bed was very uncomfortable in our little cabin and there were no blackout curtains), we returned to Anchorage. After checking every place the laptop could have been, I came to the inevitable conclusion: the thief had made off with my laptop as well as my coupon collection. Then came waves of grief and worry as I remembered what was on the laptop and the thumb drive in the laptop case with it – tax information (including social security numbers), along with sermons, Bible classes, and articles that were not backed up – and what I didn't have – a serial number or even the name of which dell product it was. I was woefully unprepared to lose it this way, and unless God's providence intercedes, the fruit of a year or so of work is gone and my identity information (along with my wife's and son's) is compromised. And for what? As the laptop is two years old, well used, and not very good to begin with, the thief will do well to get \$100 out of it. I would have given him or her more just to get it back, but that's not the way that it works.

When something is stolen from you, you experience a lot of different emotions: grief over what is lost, anger over the injustice of a crime that will undoubtedly go unpunished, self-anger over all of the questions and if's (Did I lock my car that night? If only I had taken my laptop in, etc.), fear (will my house be targeted next?), and just plain sadness. It is easy not to stop and count your blessings, not to think about what hasn't been stolen and what you still have.

Jesus told us, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19-20). The fact is that we live in a place where thieves break in and steal. They did in Jesus' time, and they still do today. They will until He returns "as a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10).

If my laptop hadn't been stolen, it could have stopped working any number of different ways – wear and tear, Ezekiel pouring water on it, me dropping it, etc. It could have burned up in a house fire, or, due to faulty wiring or some defect, caused a house fire. Jesus' words were not only meant to remind

us that things could be stolen, but that the things of this world are totally impermanent. It is foolish and futile to try to cling to them.

Instead of grieving over my loss, I need to pray for God to give the wisdom to fully set my affections on things above – while my Savior understands my emotions (Hebrews 4:15), I understand they represent a need to grow. I need to pray for God to use me to create a community where there are less thieves and more Christians. I need to pray for that thief. That heart must be pretty dark to see that laptop case beneath a child's safety seat and not care about the family that would suffer loss; that heart desperately needs the light of the gospel. I need to pray and offer thanks for all of the things that I still have – the many possessions I still own temporarily (as all earthly possessing is temporary) and the eternal treasure I have in heaven.