

AM I (ARE YOU) THE REAL DEAL?

It was a sunny, early spring day in the south side of Paris. People of wealthy stature were coming out in droves to visit Duperie Castle where an estate auction of paintings was to take place later that day. The steep 5,000 Euro price tag, to simply attend this event, was enough to keep the average Joe (or in this case, Pierre) away. The auction began late morning with the auctioneer's chant keeping people on their toes, and this spectacular event moving along at a rapid pace. You had to be there, what an adrenaline rush as people were placing high-stake bids on paintings by van Gogh, Picasso, Rembrandt, and others. The bidding and purchases continued on for hours but by early evening every painting had been sold to the highest bidder. Ah, the lifestyle of the rich and the famous.

Adrien Laurent was so very proud of his new masterpiece, a Rembrandt painting called, "*The Isle of Teleurstelling*." He and his wife Marie were looking forward to hanging it on a picturesque wall in their dining room but before they did so, Marie suggested that they have the painting appraised so it could be insured ... just in case. Adrien wrapped their masterpiece in navy blue velvet cloth and strapped it in the back seat of his Bentley Mulsanne. He then drove off his pristine country-side estate to downtown Paris where he expected to meet-up with his appraiser. Gustave was expecting him and upon Adrien's arrival he ushered Adrien and the painting into his private studio. For quite a while Gustave didn't utter a word as he adjusted lighting, scrutinized sections of the painting under a high-powered magnifying lens, and checked his findings against trusted manuscripts. This went on for over an hour and Adrien was getting restless. He asked Gustave what he thought and the first words out of his mouth totally floored Adrien; "I don't believe Rembrandt painted this but I need more time and want to make some calls." Adrien left Gustave's studio puzzled, frustrated, and not sure what to think. Later that evening Adrien received a phone call that caused him to drop into a nearby chair and his face to lose its coloring. Gustave had confirmed that the painting was a fake. Over the course of the next several weeks, the tabloids and Internet reported account after account of counterfeit paintings that had been purchased from Duperie Castle; a rip off of substantial proportions.

Ok, back to reality here, I have a confession to make. The entire storyline is a complete fabrication on my part. No such castle exist, no such paintings auction and whether there really is an Adrien Laurent is of no matter. Duperie, I learned, is French for "deception." Since Rembrandt was a Dutch painter, I looked up the word deception in Dutch and found out it is "Teleurstelling;" which is part of the fake painting name. Say what?

The world we live in today is filled with much deception; lies. Our neighbors and people we encounter everyday are really looking to satisfy their many questions and true happiness (joy) but we find they quite often search for such fulfillment in a person (e.g., mate, boyfriend/girlfriend), in material possessions, in a cult, in drugs, in alcohol, via sex, or whatever. People are searching for answers to fill the very void and emptiness that God Himself left in their

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lives. We have The Answer, and that answer is Jesus (duh!) but “have we (REALLY, emphasis mine) earned the right” to speak/share The Answer or are we just going through the motions. I know what going through the motions is, even as a so-called Christian, I did so for a season; a season I’m ashamed of. So, you might say, what’s the big deal, we’re not perfect. Right, we’re not perfect but as Christians (follower of Christ), the living Christ (our Savior) expects me to be authentic, to be genuine, very real, and not a phony. I know God issued me a “Certificate of Authenticity” when I decided to be a follower of Christ; as I was redeemed by the shed blood of the perfect Lamb of God but that “Certificate of Authenticity” (so to speak) does not give me a license to live any way I want to and expect grace to cover my willful acts of disobedience. Ouch! As a Christian the Spirit living within me asks, ‘Does my daily walk reflect Christ?’ The Spirit also questions, “Do others feel I am the real deal or would they see me as a counterfeit and keep searching for an answer to their troubles, hurts, elsewhere?”

More so every day, I believe God is calling me (and us) to live a No Compromise lifestyle; a lifestyle where I / we are so in-tune and obedient to where the Holy Spirit leads, guides and directs me (and us), wherever and whenever; at work, at schools, at play. Yes, wherever and whenever.

As a Christian, I’m learning that living out my life for Christ, 24 x 7, is really what is expected of me. The alternative, I fear, is that I’m of little earthly value to a lost and hurting world. In these last days, you and I must, under the power and influence of the Holy Spirit, stand out brightly for Jesus, or we run the risk of falling for anything.

Our mission, if we choose to accept it, is to be the “real deal (for Christ),” daily.

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