

Priceless

The phenomenon began ten years ago when MasterCard hired the McCann-Erickson agency to produce a series of TV, radio and print ads. American actor Billy Crudup has done the voiceovers since the beginning, and the formula remains basically unchanged a decade later. Each ad begins with a list of three or four tangible items or services and a matching set of prices. Next comes a phrase identifying some important intangible that can't be purchased with any amount of money followed by the single word "Priceless." And finally, the pitch: "There are some things money can't buy. For everything else, there's MasterCard."

The Harris ad tracking service deems the campaign one of the most popular to hit the media in recent years – so popular that MasterCard actually registered the word "Priceless" as a trademark. They say that what really hits home with consumers is the paradox that a credit card company that is all about paying for things would actually declare that the things that really count can't be bought. Supposedly, MasterCard understands the distinction between the goods we buy and the good life.

Ironic, isn't it? The company is actually succeeding in getting us to spend more by telling us about the things money can't buy! MasterCard takes the idea that we can have priceless moments without buying anything, and turns it into just another occasion for spending. They capitalize on our idealism to sell us more materialism. They imply that their company is somehow different, but really this is just textbook advertising strategy. Think about it – how many companies actually restrict their ads to describing only the merits of their product? Not many.

Instead, most of them try to sell us stuff by showing the imputed characteristics of the product. If you buy the car, you apparently get the girl. If you use the shampoo, you get the attention. If you serve the Hamburger Helper, you get the happy family. And, just like other ads, MasterCard's "Priceless" ads try to sell us our own deepest values by selling us mere commodities. In most of these ads, the "Priceless" moment is seen as the direct result of a series of spending decisions – all conveniently charged to your credit card. Often, it seems, the "priceless" moment actually has a considerable pricetag.

Here's a "priceless" ad that will make you think ... (VIDEO CLIP)

Illustration: *Objects on stage representing important possessions or achievements with a price tag on each one. At the end, bring a person on stage and put a different sticker ("Priceless") on them. "There is only one thing in this room that is priceless, only one thing you can take with you into eternity - a human soul." What do you want to invest your life in?*

We hear a lot of talk today about the war on terrorism, calls for jihad, nuclear threats. Never in history has there been such a time of war throughout the earth. And these conflicts are widely publicized, because of the instant communication we have. Our lives are constantly invaded by events taking place thousands of miles away. Almost immediately, we receive reports of bombings, ambushes, death tolls. These are the wars and rumors of wars Jesus spoke about. And just as He prophesied, people's hearts are failing them for fear. The wars we're seeing are causing terror throughout the earth. Yet these wars are all minor skirmishes. They're merely symptoms of a much greater war. There's actually just one war going on, and it is taking place in heaven. It's a war between God and the devil. **And the prize is something priceless – the souls of every human being on this planet.**

The book of Judges was a time of war and lawlessness in Israel, and it closes with these awful, chilling words: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). This is Satan's design for every generation. He succeeded in bringing down all true worship in Israel. By the end of Judges, men, women and children had gone their own way. And that's exactly what Satan is achieving right now, in our generation. He's attempting to outlaw the Bible, making it seem totally irrelevant. Everyone is encouraged to interpret God's Word in his own way. It's a deception straight out of hell.

What we see happening in the world right now is Satan's last-ditch effort to destroy humanity. The devil has issued an all-out battle cry. He's releasing everything in his arsenal to try to bring down God's highest creation. Scripture calls Satan's assault "a flood out of his mouth" (Revelation 12:15), a flood of iniquity. And Satan is attacking the church as well, trying to carry her away from the protection of Christ's blood. Jesus warned that in the last days iniquity would abound, and because of this flood of iniquity, the love of many would grow cold (Matthew 24:12). It seems like the church is beleaguered and besieged on every side. It seems like the darkness is winning. It seems pretty hopeless ...

And it looked just as dark for the prophet Jeremiah in the last days before Jerusalem's destruction ...

Jeremiah 32:2-3 (MSG) At that time the army of the king of Babylon was holding Jerusalem under siege. Jeremiah was shut up in jail in the royal palace. Zedekiah, king of Judah, had locked him up, complaining, **"How dare you preach**, saying, 'God says, I'm warning you: I will hand this city over to the king of Babylon and he will take it over.'

Isn't that the question the world is asking? "With such complex, frightening problems do you really think having church and preaching sermons will work?" HOW DARE YOU PREACH?!

WHY DO YOU PREACH? HOW DARE YOU PREACH? Don't tell us what we have to do! Don't tell us that judgment is imminent! Don't infringe on our lifestyle and our comfort! Don't tell us we're sinning! What good does preaching do anyway? Why bother with all these services? Why strive for worship, prayer, giving, holiness and faithfulness? Why try to build a church in a culture that doesn't care?

It Matters to this One

*As I walked along the seashore, this young boy greeted me.
He was tossing stranded starfish back to the deep blue sea.
I said, "Tell me why you bother, why waste your time this way?
There's a million stranded starfish, does it matter anyway?"
And he said, "It matters to this one, It deserves a chance to grow.
It matters to this one, I can't save them all I know.
But it matters to this one, I'll return it to the sea.
It matters to this one, and it matters to me."*

With imminent destruction staring Jerusalem in the face, God told Jeremiah to do something absolutely ridiculous ...

Jeremiah 32:6-7 (KJV) And Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption is thine to buy it.

Jeremiah 32:13-15 (KJV) And I charged Baruch before them, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and **put them in an earthen vessel**, that they may continue many days. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.

With imminent destruction staring the world in the face, God tells His church to do something absolutely ridiculous. **Invest in people!** Buy into them! It looks like they're going to resist, reject and ridicule you – and they probably will – but do it against all reason and common sense! Take everything you've fought for and paid for, and **put it in an earthen vessel**. It looks like you'll lose everything if you do that, but God says that your investment is going to be eternally valuable! Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land! **The investment the church is making in the lives of people is PRICELESS!**

2 Corinthians 4:7 (KJV) But we have **this treasure in earthen vessels**, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

Jeremiah 32:26-27 (KJV) Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah, saying, Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: **is there any thing too hard for me?**