

Abba Gelasius and the Bible Thief

Abba Gelasius was a monk who lived around 400 AD.¹ He had a leather bible worth 18 pieces of silver, which is about \$10,000 today. He normally left it in the monestary's sanctuary so that anyone who wished could read it.

One day, a strange man came to see Abba Gelasius. When the stranger saw the bible, he realized how valuable it was and that no one was guarding it. So he stole it. But Abba Gelasius was silently praying in the back of the room. He saw the stranger stealing the bible. Even so, the Abba chose not to stop him. He just watched.

The stranger went to the city to sell the bible. He found a priest and offered to exchange it for 13 pieces of silver. The priest said, "Lend it to me for a little bit, so that I may examen it and give you a fair price." The thief agreed.

So the priest took the bible. He travelled to Abba Gelasius and asked him to examen it. Abba Gelasius clearly recognized this was his stolen bible, but all he said was, "Buy it, for it is beautiful and worth the price you tell me."

When the priest next met with the thief, he said, "I have shown it to Abba Gelasius, and he agrees this is a fair price."

Shocked, the thief asked, "Didn't the Abba say anything else?"

"No," said the priest.

The thief was now filled with guilt. He told the priest, "I don't want to sell it anymore," and ran away. He ran straight to Abba Gelasius. He asked forgiveness and offered to give the old man his book back. But Abba Gelasius said, "No, you obviously want the book, so you keep it."

Questions

1. What is your most valuable possession? How would you react if someone stole it? (Maybe your brother/sister wanted it, or your parents decided to take it away.)
2. Abba Gelasius had two chances to keep his bible. First, he could have stopped the thief. Second, he could have told the priest it was really his own stolen bible and kept it. Why didn't he do either of those? Should he have?
3. In the Sermon on the mount, Jesus says:

Do not resist an evil person... Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

(Matthew 5:39-42)

This seems like an absurd commandment! *Why* would Jesus tell us to do this? Did Abba Gelasius do this? Do most Christians really behave this way?

4. Later on, Jesus tells us:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

(Mathew 6:19-21)

Where was Abba Gelasius's treasure? Where is your treasure? What does it even mean to have treasure in heaven?

5. Which character in the story is most similar to you? Which character is most similar to God?

¹Abba is a special title that means "father."