

# Welcome to “J-Talk”

Sunnyside Road Church of Christ

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## A Pop Can More Precious Than Gold



*Photo by Karolina Grabowska*

You’ve heard the saying, “You can’t take it with you!” meaning you can’t take anything earthly with you to heaven. Well, there was a rich old miser who showed up at the gates of heaven with a suitcase full of gold. When Peter saw it, the apostle laughed and shook his head and wondered aloud, “Why did you bring a sack full of paving stones with you?” (The streets of heaven are paved with gold. Get it?)

In the 19th century the complexities of refining aluminum ore made the metal more precious than gold or silver. In fact, Napoleon III, the first President of the French Republic, served his state dinners on aluminum plates. Rank-and-file guests were only served on dishes made of gold or silver!

It’s a little-known fact that the Washington Monument is topped with a pyramid 9 inches high by 5.6 inches square of pure aluminum. At the time (1884) aluminum was a precious metal and many didn’t even believe they could cast the capstone from the stuff. The pyramid was to cost a phenomenal \$75, but the final bill came to a whopping \$225. (Remember, those were 1884 dollars!) Before being placed atop the monument, the capstone was put on public display at Tiffany’s in New York City where visitors could step over it so they could all boast they had “stepped over the top of the Washington Monument.”

The problem with aluminum was how to extract the metal from its ore. Heat extracts iron, but not aluminum. Finally, in the 1820s, a German chemist was able to extract a few precious flakes and people fell in love with the shiny silver metal. In the mid-1800s, ingots sold for \$550 per pound! The French government proudly displayed bars of aluminum alongside their crown jewels.

But shortly after the Washington Monument was capped, scientists discovered a very inexpensive way of extracting aluminum from

aluminum ore, the most common metal in the earth's crust. In 1888, Alcoa managed to produce almost 50 pounds of the metal a day. Twenty years later production soared to 88,000 pounds per day! The price dropped from \$550 per pound to 25 cents per pound (1850 prices). Today aluminum can be found everywhere from pop cans to baseball bats.

On the spiritual side, I worry about how people value grace. The precious blood of Jesus takes away our sins. Grace reconciles us to God. What could be more valuable? But, perhaps, because grace is available to all, we don't value God's gift the way we should. Just because it is free doesn't mean it is cheap!

*Blessings,*

