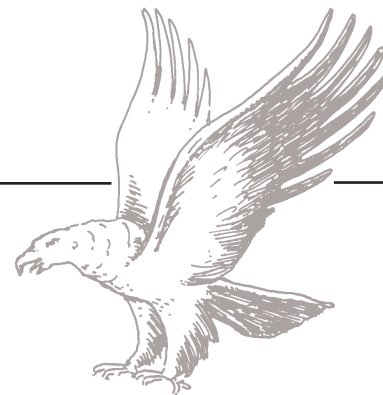# Wings

"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31

December 29, 2013

Redeeming the Time

WIth another year gone by (already?!), it is useful to take a closer look at how we use our time. Paul's counsel to "redeem the time" is a good place to start.

"See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15-16).

"Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time" (Col. 4:5).

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For a long time, Paul's admonition to "redeem the time" puzzled me. The Greek word translated "redeem" literally means "buying back." It is used in Galatians, for example, to describe our being ransomed from the curse of the old Law (3:13; 4:5). The concept of God redeeming us from bondage is easy to understand; but how do we redeem or ransom *time*? Some translations get around that odd idea by rendering the verse in the form of commentary (e.g., NASV, "making the most of your time"). That's good advice, but it's not what Paul really said. In what sense do we "buy back" time?

The solution to this conundrum is to revisit our notion of "hostage." The minutes and hours of our lives are not held captive by a malevolent agent, as we generally understand the term; but they *are* captive to our control, incapable on their own of achieving anything apart from our permission. Left alone, the days of our lives will come and go in silence, leaving nothing in their place. If they are to accomplish anything of value, it will only happen when *we* make a conscious effort to trade them for something worthwhile. Adam Clarke captures the idea beautifully in his paraphrase of this verse: "Buying up those moments which others seem to throw away; . . . Let time be your chief commodity; deal in that alone; buy it all up, and use every portion of it yourselves."

To make Paul's words more practical, think of your life as standing before a conveyor belt, with a steady stream of little units called "minutes" passing by. Those minutes are hurrying on, whether you do anything with them or not. If you choose to carelessly play with them, or just mindlessly watch them speed along, they will soon be gone forever, leaving nothing in their place. On the other hand, if you choose to grab as many minutes as you can and build something meaningful with them, something worthwhile and durable, you will be trading those minutes for something of enduring value; you will have *redeemed* the time allotted to you.

Look at the frivolous manner in which most people use their time. Some people throw away their lives (time) in sexual debauchery (Eph. 5:5) or getting drunk (Eph. 5:18). Others waste their time watching brain-dead television shows, playing video games, or surfing the Internet. These aimless behaviors may entertain for the moment, but they provide no lasting sense of achievement. People allow the days of their lives to pass by unredeemed, lost forever by careless indifference to the value of that commodity.

There is nothing wrong with having occasional down time to refresh and recharge. But when large chunks of our time are spent on such diversions, we're playing the fool. Someday the conveyor belt will run out of minutes, and we will look back with regret on all the time we wasted. At that point, of course, it will be too late. *Redeem the time—now!*

– David King

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