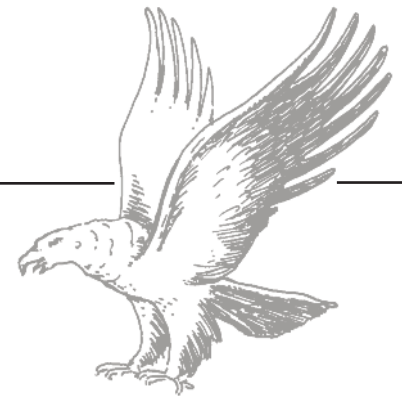


Wings

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



October 25, 2015

The Higher Challenge

In our pursuit of excellence as disciples of Jesus, it's easy for us to get distracted by peripheral issues that do not effect our greater duty: to hear and keep God's word.

"And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!' But He said, 'More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!'" (Lk. 11:27-28).

This incident in the life of Jesus speaks directly to those today who venerate Mary as an object of worship. Jesus specifically discouraged such worship, pointing people instead to something that should be of greater importance.

Our purpose here is not to bash those who engage in Mariolatry, but to examine a larger principle implicit in Jesus' words. In our efforts to follow Jesus, we could be guilty of the same misguided affections as this woman.

First, ponder the reason why this woman felt compelled to pronounce a blessing on Jesus' mother. No doubt, she had a great deal of respect for Jesus; but as a woman, her mind had wandered beyond that loyalty to the intense feel-

ings that His mother must have experienced as the bearer of the Messiah. Oh, to have a son like this! So gifted! So perfect! So famous! To be the mother of such an extraordinary son must be the highest blessing God could bestow upon a woman!

All true, yes . . . but all so utterly irrelevant. Whatever respect (or envy, or empathy) this woman may have felt for Jesus' mother meant absolutely nothing in establishing her own relationship with God. That's why Jesus' rebuke went straight to the heart of the matter: The only blessing that counts is the one that comes from hearing and keeping God's word. This woman needed to get her head out of the clouds and focus on the task at hand: What does God want me to do with my life?

There is a broader lesson here for us today. In our enthusiasm for the cause of Jesus, how often do we get drawn away after topics that, although related to Jesus in some way, have no direct bearing on the central question of our lives, namely, *How does God want me to live?* We expend a good chunk of our time

chasing after issues like the age of the earth, or the nature of the Trinity, or harmonizing details in the four Gospels—issues that, even if we could resolve them expertly, would have no appreciable effect on how we live.

Look carefully at the overall scope of Jesus' teaching (the Sermon on the Mount [Matt. 5-7] is a good place to start). The bulk of His teaching emphasized the development of *personal character* as the highest obligation, starting with a profound love for God and a love for our fellow man. If we fail to make progress in that higher challenge, we are no better than Pharisees—very religious, but totally clueless about what it means to serve God.

To be sure, Mary was a blessed woman, and there was nothing wrong with saying so. Likewise, there is nothing wrong with probing all these other subjects that have a Biblical basis. But we must be careful that our pursuit of these things does not distract us from the more important obligation before us, namely, to "hear the word of God and keep it."

— David King