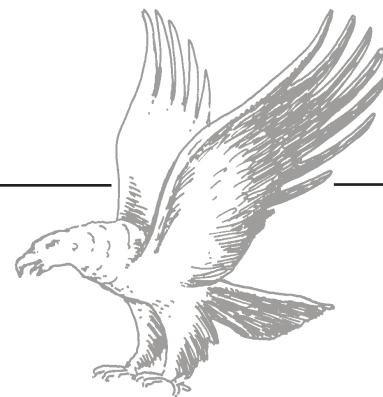


Wings

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



October 9, 2016

But First . . .

One of the greatest obstacles preventing disciples from being more effective is their failure to distinguish good things from greater things—and to act accordingly.

"He said to another, 'Follow Me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.' And another also said, 'Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.' But Jesus said to him, 'No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God'" (Lk. 9:57-62).



The men with whom Jesus had these exchanges were not His enemies. They did not mock or accuse Jesus, as His critics often did. They believed in Him, and if we can take their statements at face value, they really did want to follow Him. "But first" they had other priorities that required their attention, so they begged to be temporarily excused.

Which is another way of saying, Jesus was no better than second on their list of priorities.

The responses of Jesus to these men seem harsh, but He saw a serious problem underlying their excuses. If it was

that easy for them to dodge the Master's call on this occasion, they would continue dodging it through the rest of their lives. Whatever service they offered Him would be squishy and inconsistent. Jesus was telling these men up front that He didn't need that kind of disciple. They had to be all in, or go elsewhere.

Jesus challenged these men because He understood human nature. He knew that once people start making excuses, the excuses never stop coming. One excuse is followed by another which is followed by another . . . and somehow we never get around to doing *the very thing that we acknowledge is most important!*

This story warns the rest of us of how easy it is to allow earthly concerns to interfere with our service to the Lord. I know I ought to go visit that elderly shut-in who is lonely . . . *but first* I need to clean house and do the laundry. I really do want to spend more quality time with the kids . . . *but first* I need to catch up on all the latest news on my electronic device. It would be great if somebody would do some door-knocking in the

neighborhood to promote our upcoming gospel meeting . . . but please excuse me, I'm just too busy with personal matters *that must come first*. Who are we kidding?

The problem in all these scenarios is not that we are choosing evil over good; it's that we're choosing a *lesser* good over a *greater* good. The really important tasks are being neglected for the sake of more mundane obligations that could be postponed or re-arranged with a little effort. Whether we realize it or not, we are revealing those things that our heart views as of greater importance. The Lord and His work can wait.

The church today is filled with decent people who—in their own way—love the Lord and want to do the right thing, but their lives are too cluttered with trivial matters to be of much use in the Lord's kingdom. So the critical work never gets done. No wonder the church is not growing.

Jesus is still looking for followers today. But what He really needs are those few who are ready to put Him *first* in their lives. Are you game?

— David King