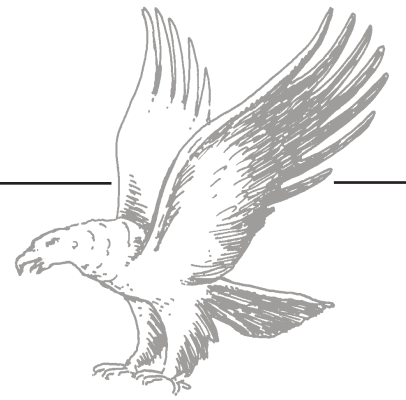


Wings

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



January 1, 2017

Why This Waste?

When money becomes the primary measure by which we evaluate our options, we lose sight of what is *really* important and make unwise decisions.

"And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table. But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, 'Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor.' But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, 'Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me'" (Matt. 26:6-10).



John identifies this woman as Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (Jn. 12:1-3). He also tells us that the fragrant oil was a pound in weight—probably about twelve ounces by our measure. This oil was rare, so such a large quantity of it would have been very expensive. Judas pegged the value at about 300 denarii, roughly a year's wage (Jn. 12:5). So when Mary anointed Jesus with it, a lot of money disappeared.

The apostles were scandalized by this extravagance. Like a lot of men, they looked at this strictly from a mone-

tary perspective. The oil could have accomplished much more if it had been sold and the proceeds given to the poor. A year's wages could have made quite a dent in the local poverty problem. Mark's account says that "they criticized her sharply" (Mk. 14:8).

Jesus looked at Mary's sacrifice through a different lens. "You have the poor with you always" (v. 11) is another way of saying, there will be other opportunities to help the poor. But with Jesus' departure drawing near, Mary would have only one chance to express her love for Him. In a culture where women were marginalized, there wasn't much she could do. But she did have this flask of precious oil (perhaps inventory from a family business?), so she "did what she could" (Mk. 14:8) and anointed Jesus' body with the entire amount. It is likely that a few days later at His trial, His body still gave off the fragrance from this generous gift. Mary was literally preparing Him for burial, and Jesus honored her for it (v. 12-13).

The reaction of the apostles—"Why this waste?"—speaks directly to our

own skewed value system. When financial considerations are the only bottom line in our decision making we, too, will pass up opportunities to serve the Lord in favor of more mundane pursuits.

For example, the Lord wants us to spend time meeting with our brethren, encouraging and strengthening one another (Heb. 10:24-25). The man with his eyes on the world looks at that and says, "Why this waste? I could be working overtime or making progress on a DIY project!"

The Lord wants us to give generously to His work (2 Cor. 9:6-7). But too many people say, "Why this waste? That money could buy a better car or a nicer home or a bass boat!"

A young woman decides to devote her life to service as a full time wife and mother. Her feminist sisters deride her, saying, "Why this waste? Your real potential is found in the workplace, not in the home!"

What is important in life is not always measured by money. We need to get our priorities straight by *God's* standard, and make our choices accordingly.

— David King