



WHAT A WASTE!

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Acts 4:23 As soon as they were freed, Peter and John returned to the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. ²⁴ When they heard the report, all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God: “O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—²⁵ You spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, Your servant, saying (Psalm 2),

‘Why were the nations so angry? Why did they waste their time with futile plans?

²⁶ The kings of the earth prepared for battle; the rulers gathered together against the Lord and against His Messiah.’

²⁷ “In fact, this has happened here in this very city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, Your holy servant, whom You anointed. ²⁸ But everything they did was determined beforehand according to Your will.

Some have alluded to this passage as a reference to circumstances of our generation—the removal of the Bible from schools, the removal of the Ten Commandments from the public square, the categorization of church meetings as not “essential” gatherings during a pandemic.

Perhaps there is a hint of such an attitude today, but in the days of the Early Church, it wasn’t necessary to read between the lines to discover such clear rebellion. Some of the same people who welcomed Jesus to the gates of Jerusalem with shouts of “Hosanna!” turned, in short order, to cry out, “Crucify Him!” The Jewish leaders wanted Him dead. The Gentile government accommodated their wishes.

Nor will it be a vague application at the close of the Great Tribulation period, described in The Revelation, at which time a vast federation of rulers and nations will unite in a passionate determination to prevent Christ from taking the reigns of world government. But it will prove to be another exercise in futility. A waste of time and energy.

A Waste of Time

What you think is a “waste of time” will be determined by the values you cherish.

For instance, Paul wrote to his mentees, Timothy and Titus, as follows:

1 Timothy 1:3 When I left for Macedonia, I urged you to stay there in Ephesus and stop those whose teaching is contrary to the truth. ⁴ Don't let them waste their time in endless discussion of myths and spiritual pedigrees. These things only lead to meaningless speculations, which don't help people live a life of faith in God.

1 Timothy 4:7 Do not waste time arguing over godless ideas and old wives' tales. Instead, train yourself to be godly.

Titus 3:9 Do not get involved in foolish discussions about spiritual pedigrees or in quarrels and fights about obedience to Jewish laws. These things are useless and a waste of time.

The value that Paul championed was “being godly” or “living a life of faith in God.” Such “endless” and “foolish” discussions of “myths and spiritual pedigrees” or “godless ideas and old wives' tales” or “obedience to Jewish laws” Paul called “useless, meaningless speculations.”

Today's social media are rife with such discussions/arguments/rants. Paul would count them a waste of time, because they masquerade as “spiritual endeavors,” but they actually distract you from the real work of godliness—reading the Bible, prayer, genuine fellowship, and service—and weaken your practice of faith in God. A waste of time and energy.

Three women are spotlighted in the Bible, who received Jesus' praise, because of their high values—values which His disciples, at that time, did not yet share.

A Waste of Effort

One was a widow woman whom Jesus observed at the gate of the Temple treasury:

Mark 12:41 Jesus sat down near the collection box in the Temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. ⁴² Then a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins.

⁴³ Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. ⁴⁴ For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on.”

Out of the crowds who contributed to the Temple treasury, Jesus' eagle-eye spotted a single woman, whose manner of giving He highlighted for His disciples.

Normally, everyone is impressed by rich people—their fine clothing, their style, their air of self-assurance. And, normally, people ignore the poor—especially those who simply go about their own business, not camping on the sidewalks or parading themselves with panhandlers' cardboard signs.

But Jesus isn't normal. He is unimpressed by the rich, and compassionately aware of the poor.

The disciples' disdain for the poor widow's meager gift is not recorded, but it is implied by Jesus' teaching.

For He remarked to His disciples, "The rich have given what amounts to a teeny bit of the excess they possess, while this poor widow has contributed everything she had to live on in worship of God."

A Waste of Treasure

On another occasion, near the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus gave them similar instruction when another woman lavishly anointed Him with perfume:

Mark 14:3 Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon, a man who had previously had leprosy. While He was eating, a woman came in with a beautiful alabaster jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard. She broke open the jar and poured the perfume over His head. ⁴ Some of those at the table were indignant. "Why waste such expensive perfume?" they asked. ⁵ "It could have been sold for a year's wages and the money given to the poor!" So they scolded her harshly.

What do you earn in a year? \$25,000? \$60,000? \$150,000?

"It could have been sold for a year's wages! And given to the poor." So they scolded her harshly.

I feel confident that they thought Jesus would be impressed by their reaction to her extravagance. Thinking to themselves, "We remember that poor widow; Jesus loves the poor," they said to the woman: "Don't you care? You could have done so much to improve social equity. Where is your concern for justice? Have you no compassion? Your worship is a waste of time and treasure!"

Mark 14:6 But Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. Why criticize her for doing such a good thing to Me? ⁷ You will always have the poor among you, and you can help them whenever you want to. But you will not always have Me. ⁸ She has done what she could and has anointed My body for burial ahead of time. ⁹ I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman's deed will be remembered and discussed."

If I had been there, I would have been bewildered! First, ashamed that somehow I got it wrong. Then, confused by what appeared to be contradicting values. Then, angry that Jesus

had betrayed my understanding of Him. (Regrettably, I confess that it is often my understanding of Him that is the very idol that separates me from His grace.)

Let me be clear: Jesus was not minimizing the weight of poverty, nor excusing ignoring to help the poor. He said, "There will be plenty of opportunities for helping others (and you should do that). But in doing that, don't miss your privilege of worship, nor mistakenly think those two are one and the same."

Give, where and when giving is needed. And worship when you have opportunity to do so.

One is temporal; the other is eternal. Do not confuse them. We have responsibilities, before God, in BOTH dimensions (the temporal and the eternal). Do not ignore either. But do not confuse their values.

A Waste of Talent

All of this became abundantly clear on a visit to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus:

Luke 10:38 As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹ Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, "Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me."

⁴¹ But the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details!

⁴² There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her."

In Christ's Kingdom, all people have equal value, but not equal roles or responsibilities. And all Kingdom activities are valuable, but their priorities vary, according to need and opportunity.

There is a time for everything under heaven.

But don't take your cues from the world or the culture of the day. Listen to the voice of the Spirit of God. He ALWAYS knows how to weight your opportunities and prioritize your responsibilities.

No Waste

After Peter's and John's release from prison, the disciples prayed, quoting Psalm 2, noting its application to their own challenging circumstances. They also recognized that God knew it all ahead of time and had the psalmist record those words to encourage them. They acknowledged, "*everything they did was determined beforehand according to Your will.*"

Acts 4:29 And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, Your servants, great boldness in preaching Your word. ³⁰ Stretch out Your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”

Their highest values were not their own security or future comfort. They valued the coming of the Kingdom of God. They valued sharing the truth of God’s Word. They valued showing His mercy and power, and exalting the name of Jesus to the public.

This time they got it right! And the Lord took notice, as He responded to their prayer:

Acts 4:31 After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.

What you think is a “waste of time” will be determined by the values you cherish.

Do you love what Jesus loves and hate what Jesus hates? If we only observe life superficially, His values may appear to shift.

But if we get to know His heart—through the Scriptures and through prayer—we will recognize His priorities, and know that some values have a singular time and place, while others are enduring.

Don’t let the culture squeeze you into its mold. Don’t get entangled in other people’s wasteful habits.

Check your values—in entertainment, in recreation, in business, and in church.

Quit wasting your time and energy on things that do not bear the fruit Christ is looking for.

Holy Spirit, help us!