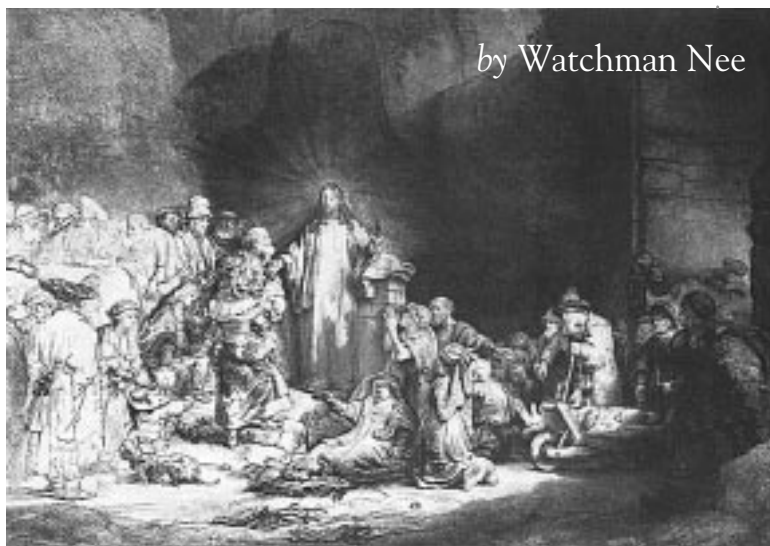




Be Still.

Waste

by Watchman Nee



AND while He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head. But

THOUGHTS AND READINGS FOR MEDITATION

some were indignantly remarking to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they were scolding her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. For the poor you always have with you, and whenever you wish, you can do them good; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. And truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, that also which this woman has done shall be spoken of in memory of her." (Mark 14:3-9 NAS)

The Lord has ordained that the story of Mary anointing Him with the costly ointment should always accompany the preaching of the gospel. We know the story well. Judging by the story in connection with her brother's resurrection, we know that the family was not an especially wealthy one. The sisters had to work in the house themselves, and one of them, Mary, had an alabaster box with three hundred pence worth of ointment in it, and with a stroke she broke it and poured the whole of that costly nard upon the head of the Lord. According

to human reasoning it was altogether too much, even for the Lord. That is why Judas took the lead with the other disciples in thinking that Mary was wasting something (John 12:4-5).

Now we come to the word which the Lord wants to emphasise at this time, the word waste. What is waste? Waste simply means giving too much. If a shilling will do and you give a pound, it is waste. If two ounces will do and you give a kilogram, it is a waste. A waste means that you give something too much for something too little. A waste means that the

When once our eyes have been opened to the worth of the Lord, nothing is too good for Him.

one who is receiving the something is not worth so much. Yet we are dealing here with something the Lord said was to go out with the gospel, wherever the gospel should be preached. With the preaching of the gospel the Lord is out to have a result that corresponds with Mary's action here: that is, for people to come out and "waste" themselves on Him. That is what He is after. Now we must look at the question from two angles, that of Judas, and that of the other

disciple. They all thought it to be a waste. To Judas, who had never called our Lord the Lord, everything that was poured upon Him was waste. Even water would have been waste. To the world, the service of the Lord, and our giving of ourselves to Him is pure waste. "Such and such a man would have made good in the world if he were not a Christian," is a sentiment that is frequently expressed. For anyone with natural talents to be a Christian, to serve the Lord, is deemed to be pure waste.

So thought Judas, "We could manage better with the money; we could give it to charity; we could do some social service, we could help people in a more practical way. Why pour it down at the feet of Jesus? As to yourself, can you not find a better employment of your life?" That is what Judas was thinking, and that is what the world is thinking. It is too much to give yourself to the Lord! But no! When once our eyes have been opened to the worth of the Lord, nothing is too good for Him.

But it is upon the reaction of the other disciples that I want most to dwell; for they affect us more than does Judas. We do not mind very much what the world is saying, but we do mind what those other disciples are saying who ought

to have understood, yet did not. We mark that they said the same thing as Judas; and not only so, but they were moved to indignation, saying, "*To what purpose is this waste...*?"

Now here is the whole question of waste, and of what the Lord is after. Today, even amongst Christians, there can be found much of that spirit that wants to give as little as possible to the Lord, and yet to get as much as possible from Him. The prevailing thought today is of being used, as though that were the one thing that mattered. That my little rubber band should be stretched to the very limit seems all important. But this is not the Lord's mind. The Lord wants us to be used, yes; but what He is after is that we pour all we have, ourselves, to Him, and if that be all, that is enough. It is not a question of whether the poor have been helped or not, but of whether the Lord has been satisfied. The question is not one of working for Him, my friends, but of service to Him, of ministering to the Lord. That is what He is after; that I should give Him my all, even though people should say, 'You are doing nothing!' My service to the Lord is to please Him. There is many a meeting we might take, many a convention at which we might speak, many a campaign in which we might share, but this is not the first consideration. That my usefulness should be brought to the full is not what the Lord is after, but **His concern is rather with my position at His feet and my anointing of His head.** What I have as an alabaster box, the most precious thing, is my whole life. I give it all up to the Lord. It seems as if it is a waste, but that is what He is after. May I tell you something? One thing some of us have come to learn is that in the divine service the principle of "waste" is the principle of power, whereas the principle of "usefulness" is the very principle of scattering. The real usefulness in the hand of the Lord is "waste." The more you think you could do, the more you employ your gifts to the very limit—and perhaps beyond the limit—that you will find to be the principle of the world, and not the principle of the Lord. I knew a sister in the Lord, now in His presence, who was very greatly used of Him. But my first concern about her was that she did not seem to be being used. Every time I said to myself. Why did she not get out and take some meetings, get somewhere, do something? It was a waste to live in a small village without anything happening. Sometimes when I went to see her, I almost shouted at her: "No one knows the Lord as you do. You know the Book in a most living way. Do you not see the need all around you? Why don't you do something? It is a waste of time, a waste of energy, a waste of money, a waste of everything, just sitting here and doing nothing!" But she was the one who helped me most of all. The highest thing is not just to be moving about. I do not mean to

say that we are going to do nothing, but **the first thing is the Lord Himself, not the work.** That is what He is after.

So the Lord said, "Why trouble ye her? She has wrought a good work as to Me. The poor you will always have, but you cannot always have Me." The whole point is, What am I going to do to the Lord today? Did those other women who came with their spices to the tomb succeed in anointing the Lord's body? No! He was risen. Only one succeeded, Mary, **who anointed Him beforehand.** It seems as if man will say I am wasting my time—but Lord, nothing is too good for You! He is worthy to be served. He is worthy for me just to be His prisoner. He is worthy for me just to live for Him. Let others say what they will. Have our eyes been opened to see that working for the poor, working for the benefit of the world, working for the eternal welfare of the sinner, as things in themselves,

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are not to be compared with the work we do to the Lord, with our being just for Him. What is your estimate of the Lord?

Then the Lord said, "She hath done what she could." It means that Mary had given her all. That was all she could do, no more; and she did it. The Lord will not be satisfied with anything less. The whole point is a life really laid down at the feet of the Lord, and that in view of His death, His burial; that is, in view of a future day. Then it was His burial, now it is His crowning day that is in view. He will be acclaimed by all in that day, but how precious, far more precious to Him it is that we should anoint Him now; not with any material oil, but with that which is deepest and, maybe, hardest for us to break. The Lord get anointing from us today!

Further, the Lord said, "Wherever the gospel shall be preached, this story shall be told." Why? Because the gospel is meant to produce this. The gospel is not primarily for the satisfaction of sinners. The gospel is preached that everything may be to the satisfaction of the Son of God. Not to sinners first of all, though, praise God, sinners will be satisfied. But supremely it is Christ who must find satisfaction through its preaching.

Once more let me repeat. The whole question for us is simply this: It seems that I am giving too much for too little. That is

waste. Others appear to far better advantage than I, though they have given up none of the things that I have. As for me, I seem to meet with all the difficulties. Continual trial and suffering is what comes my way. Now, am I not wasting my time? If I consecrate myself enough for the blessing, but not enough for the trouble; if I consecrate myself enough for the Lord to use me, but not enough for the Lord to shut me up, it will be all right! Are we not found thinking thus at times? But the principle of waste is that which satisfies the heart of the Lord Jesus. You can get something for yourself out of your consecration, but often real satisfaction can only come to the heart of your Lord when you seem to be "wasting" yourself on the Lord, giving too much and getting nothing back for yourself.

O friends, what are we after? Are we after mere usefulness, as those disciples were? They wanted to make every penny of that three hundred pence go to its full length. They wanted to be used themselves. If only we can please Him, surely that should be enough.

Now the breaking of the alabaster box and the anointing of the Lord filled the house with the odour, with the sweetest odour. Everyone could smell it. Whenever you meet someone who has really suffered, been limited, gone through things for the Lord, willing to be imprisoned by the Lord, just being satisfied with Him and nothing else, immediately you scent the fragrance. There is a savour of the Lord. Something has been crushed, something has been broken, and there is a resulting odour of sweetness. The perfume which filled the house that day still fills the Church; Mary's fragrance never passes away.

Friends, we cannot produce impressions of God upon others, impart the sense of the presence of God, without the breaking of everything, even the most precious things, at the feet of the Lord Jesus. The Lord would have us here, not first of all to preach or to do work for Him, but to create hunger in others. No true work will begin in any life apart from a sense of need. We cannot inject that into others, we cannot drive people to be hungry for God. Such hunger can be created only by those whose lives convey vital impressions of Him. Oh, to be wasted! It is a blessed thing to be wasted for the Lord. So many of us who have been prominent in the Christian world know nothing of this. Many of us have been used to the full—have been used, I would say, too much—but we don't know what it means to be wasted on God. We like to be always "on the go": the Lord would sometimes prefer to have us in prison. We think in terms of apostolic journeys: God dares to put His greatest ambassadors in chains. "But thanks be unto God, which always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest through us the savour of his knowledge in every place" (2 Corinthians 2:14). ■

EXPOSITION MUST HAVE APPLICATION!

CHARLES G. FINNEY believed that Bible teaching without moral application could be worse than no teaching at all, and could result in positive injury to the hearers. I used to feel that this might be an extreme position, but after years of observation I have come around to it, or to a view almost identical with it.

There is scarcely anything so dull and meaningless as Bible doctrine taught for its own sake. Truth divorced from life is not truth in its Biblical sense, but something else and something less. Theology is a set of facts concerning God, man and the world. These facts may be, and often are, set forth as values in themselves; and there lies the snare both for the teacher and for the hearer.

The Bible is among other things a book of revealed truth. That is, certain facts are revealed that could not be discovered by the most brilliant mind. These facts are of such a nature as to be past finding out. They were hidden behind a veil, and until certain men who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost took away that veil, **no mortal man could know them.** This lifting of the veil of unknowing from undiscoverable things we call divine revelation.

The Bible, however, is more than a volume of hitherto unknown facts about God, man and

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the universe. It is a book of exhortation based upon those facts. By far the greater portion of the book is devoted to an urgent effort to persuade people to alter their ways and bring their lives into harmony with the will of God, as set forth in its pages.

No man is better for knowing that God in the beginning created the heavens and the earth. The devil knows that, and so did Ahab and Judas Iscariot. No man is better for knowing that God so loved the world of men that He gave His only begotten Son to die for their redemption. In hell there are millions that know that. Theological truth is useless until it is obeyed. **The purpose behind all doctrine is to secure moral action.**

What is generally overlooked is that truth as set forth in the Christian Scriptures is a moral thing; it is not addressed to the intellect only, but to the will also. It addresses itself to the total man, and its obligations cannot be discharged by grasping it mentally. Truth engages the citadel of the human heart and is not satisfied until it has conquered

everything there. The will must come forth and surrender its sword. It must stand at attention to receive orders, and those orders it must joyfully obey. Short of this any knowledge of Christian truth is inadequate and unavailing.

Bible exposition without moral application raises no opposition. It is only when the hearer is made to understand that truth is in conflict with his heart that resistance sets in. As long as people can bear orthodox truth, divorced from life, they will attend and support churches and institutions without objection. The truth is a lovely song, become sweet by long and tender association; and since it asks nothing but a few dollars, and offers good music, pleasant friendships and a comfortable sense of well-being, it meets with no resistance from the faithful. Much that passes for New Testament Christianity is little more than objective truth sweetened with song and made palatable by religious entertainment.

Probably no other portion of the Scriptures can compare with the Pauline Epistles when it comes to making artificial saints. Peter warned that the unlearned and unstable would wrest Paul's writings to their own destruction, and we have only to visit the average Bible Conference and listen to a few lectures to know what he meant. The

ominous thing is that the Pauline doctrines may be taught with complete faithfulness to the letter of the text without making the hearers one whit better. The teacher may, and often does, so teach the truth as to leave the hearers without a sense of moral obligation.

One reason for the divorce between truth and life may be the lack of the Spirit's illumination. Another surely is the teacher's unwillingness to get himself into trouble. Any man with fair pulpit gifts can get on with the average congregation if he just "feeds" them and lets them alone. Give them plenty of objective truth and never hint that they are wrong and should be set right, and they will be content.

On the other hand, the man who preaches truth and applies it to the lives of his hearers will feel the nails and the thorns. He will lead a hard life, but a glorious one. May God raise up many such prophets. The church needs them badly.

A. W. TOZER from "Of God and Men"

Lack of Time

You may not find it necessary to die for Christ, but are you willing to live for Him? Andrew Murray, author of many Christian classics, wrote:

The low state of the spiritual life of Christians is due to the fact that they do not realize that the aim and object of conversion is to bring the soul, even here on earth, to a daily fellowship with the Father in heaven. When once this truth has been accepted, the believer will perceive how indispensable it is to the spiritual life of a Christian to take time each day with God's Word and in prayer to wait upon God for His presence and His love to be revealed.

It is not enough at conversion to accept forgiveness of sins, or even to surrender to God. That is only a beginning. The young believer must understand that he has no power of his own to maintain his spiritual life. No, he needs each day to receive new grace from heaven through fellowship with the Lord Jesus.

This cannot be obtained by a hasty prayer, nor a superficial reading of a few verses from God's Word. He must take time quietly and deliberately to come into God's presence, to feel his own weakness and his need, and to wait upon God through His Holy Spirit, to renew the heavenly light and life in his heart. Then he may rightly expect to be kept by the power of Christ throughout the day, with all its temptations.

Many of God's children long for a better life, but do not realise the need of giving God time day by day in their inner chamber through His Spirit to renew and sanctify their lives.

Meditate on this thought: "The feeble state of my spiritual life is mainly due to the lack of time day by day in fellowship with God." ❧

THE SHEER ORDINARINESS OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE

WHAT IS SO STRIKING ABOUT THE STORY OF ESTHER IS THE SHEER ORDINARINESS AND UNOBTRUSIVENESS OF GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL WORKINGS . . .

The book of Esther is vastly encouraging and reassuring. Nowhere is God's name mentioned, but his presence is everywhere evident. Simply reading through Esther confronts you, at every turn, with the palpable truth of God's sovereign providence: unseen, and unknown at least to King Ahasuerus and his Prime Minister Haman, the covenant Lord worked out "everything in conformity with the purpose of his will," for his own glory and the preservation and good of his people.

What is so striking about the story of Esther is the sheer ordinariness and unobtrusiveness of God's providential workings. We see it perhaps most starkly in the "beauty contest" that decides who will be the next queen of Persia. We are told that Esther "was lovely in form and features," and it was this beauty that first brought her to the attention of the palace officials. We are not to imagine that some happy accident of genetic configuration accounted for Esther's "form and features": all she was, she was by the sovereign providence of God. It was God's decree which set her in her family line, gave her the parents who conceived her and shared their genes with her. How she looked, and the fact she was a stunning beauty, was due to God's providence.

Even in the tackiness of a beauty contest (and few things are more tacky and pathetic than beauty contests), the covenant Lord was

ordering events and controlling who would be chosen. The point that the writer is skilfully, in an understated way, pressing upon us, is that even in such a worldly arena of male chauvinism, God was at work, fulfilling his purposes and preserving his people.

There is a massive truth here for us to take to heart. Frederick Faber put it well in his great hymn 'Workmen of God': "Thrice blest is to whom is given the instinct that can tell; that God is on the field when he is most invisible." In every arena of life, even in the tacky arenas of wanton worldliness and political intrigue, our covenant Lord is providentially ordering events to secure his glory and the building of his church in the world. **Christians need never despair, no matter the situation or circumstances.** If our God can overrule a beauty contest for his people's good, there is no event he cannot bend to accomplish his sovereign will. The God of Israel was accomplishing his purposes, and everyone looking on (except for Mordecai and perhaps Esther), only saw men ogling at beautiful women. God not only uses the wrath of man to praise him, he uses all their pathetic schemes to advance his sovereign will, while never for one moment becoming contaminated by their wickedness.

When the Psalmist wrote "My times are in



your hands," he was encouraging his soul. As you look out on your particular circumstances and are at times tempted to despair, remember who your God is: the God who rules nations, presidents, prime ministers and beauty contests. All you are, physically, temperamentally, intellectually, you are by God's decree. He providentially ordains and orders all your ways and the ways of all men and women everywhere. For the child of God, this is not first a conundrum to solve, it is a pillow to lie on! You may never end up in a beauty contest (at least I hope you don't), but whatever your circumstances, it is not mere men who are 'calling the shots,' it is your covenant Lord who is shaping events and pursuing his purposes. This is why Faber wrote "Thrice blest is he to whom is given the instinct that can tell that God is on the field when he is most invisible." He is never off the field, even when the field is a tacky beauty contest. **Our God reigns.**

— IAN HAMILTON

☞ THE WATERS OF SATISFACTION SCATTERED ☞

"...Nevertheless, he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord." 2 SAMUEL 23:16

What has been like water from the well of Bethlehem to you recently—love, friendship, spiritual blessing? Then at the peril of your soul, you take it to satisfy yourself. If you do, you cannot pour it out before the Lord. You can never sanctify to God that with which you long to satisfy yourself. If you satisfy yourself with a blessing from God, it will corrupt you; you must sacrifice it, pour it out, do with it what common sense says is an absurd waste.

How am I to pour out unto the Lord natural love or spiritual blessing? In one way only—in the determination of my mind. There are certain acts of other people which one could never accept if one did not know God, because it is not within human power to repay them. But immediately I say—This is too great and worthy for me, it is not meant for a human being at all, I must pour it out unto the Lord, then these things pour out in rivers of living water all around. Until I do pour these things out before the Lord, they endanger those I love as well as myself because they will turn to lust. We can be lustful in things which are not sordid and vile. Love has to get to its transfiguration point of being poured out unto the Lord.

If you are always taking blessings to yourself and never learn to pour out anything unto the Lord, other people do not get their horizon enlarged through you. If you have become bitter and sour, it is because when God gave you a blessing you clutched it for yourself; whereas if you had poured it out unto the Lord, you would have been the sweetest person out of heaven.

Jesus did not say—"he that believeth in Me shall realise the blessing of the fullness of God," but—"he that believeth in Me, out of Him shall escape everything he receives." Our Lord's teaching is always ANTI-self-realisation. His purpose is not the development of a man; His purpose is to make a man exactly like Himself, and the characteristic of the Son of God is self-expenditure. It we believe in Jesus, it is not what we gain, but what He pours through us that counts. It is not that God makes us into beautifully rounded grapes, but that He squeezes the sweetness out of us.

God spilt the life of His Son that the world might be saved; are we prepared to spill out our lives for Him?

— OSWALD CHAMBERS