

Title: A Royal “Waste” of Time<sup>i</sup>  
Text: Hebrews 13.15-16  
Theme: Sacrifice of Praise  
Series: Hebrews #59  
Prop Stmnt The right response to Christ is a vertical sacrifice of praise and a horizontal sacrifice of resources.  
Aim: I aim to help my people give more generously of themselves to God in worship and to each other because of God’s grace.

In order to understand this text we have to understand “sacrifice”. We think of it in terms of giving that which is costly for the good of another or as an expression of love, even worship. Sacrifice stands between God and man and therefore has two aspects to it. Those two aspects are righteous judgment and infinite grace. Because God is righteous and man is sinful, man is rightly under the judgment of God and a sacrifice of atonement must be offered to appease, that is to satisfy the righteousness of God. So, on the one hand, a sacrifice must be made that will accomplish that, and we have nothing that will meet the requirement, meaning, we are hopeless. Except! Except, God has provided for us, what we could not provide for ourselves. God provided the lamb! God provided the sacrifice. God provided the offering in our place, which is none other than Christ. So, the offering of Christ as the sinless sacrifice for our sins on the cross stands between us and the judgment of God and enables us to be rightly related to Him. God responded to his own justice with a sacrifice for us that revealed his grace. We respond to his grace (the gospel – the good news of the sacrifice of Christ) with a sacrifice of praise. What is a sacrifice of praise? What is this costly worship, this expression of love? And, what qualifies as a sacrifice of praise? How do you measure sacrifice? And, since His grace is infinite, then, can any response of worship be too much?

Read Text:

It stands as one of the most amazing scenes in the life of Christ, in fact, in the entire Bible – for that matter.<sup>ii</sup> One evening, during the last week before he died, Christ was eating a meal with his disciples at the home of man known as Simon, the leper. Meals were long events and not drive-thru affairs. Simon, it is assumed had been healed of his leprosy by Christ. This man, who had at one time been cut off from his home, people and city, without a cure, was now home and whole. The meal was itself most likely in appreciation for what Christ had done for him, a sacrifice of praise, a costly act in response to the grace of Christ. But, is there a limit to sacrifice? The men were reclining around a table when a woman came in. She produced a jar of perfume. The text calls it an “**alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly.**” She poured the entire flask upon the head of Christ. The disciples, especially Judas Iscariot, were indignant. Do you know what indignant means? It is more than being angry. It is anger with a cause. Indignant is the “righteous” reaction of one whose moral law has been broken. This waste of perfume was shocking, wasteful, and obscene!

How ironic! Christ, who hardly had a change of clothes, who had no house of his own, no land, no animals, no boat, no possessions to speak of, is obviously a very practical person. He is extremely utilitarian. The disciples seemed to operate on such a shoestring of a budget that when it came time to pay the Temple Tax, Peter cannot even afford that! Now this! Perfume! Expensive perfume simply poured out on the head of Christ. Does it make any sense? Everything about this could be described as “extravagant”. Seriously, who needs perfume? It’s not like food, water, shelter or medicine, is it? Alabaster? Pure nard? Worth about 10 month’s salary? Poured out all at once upon the head of a single person? Do you know how much that is worth? Do you know how many mouths that would feed? Mary! You are not married, and have no children to take care of you when you get old. You could have used that. You could have sold that! In fact, what were you doing with that in the first place? But, that doesn’t matter now – because it is all gone, all used up, all poured out, and there’s no getting it back in the bottle. What a waste!

But, that is not how Christ saw it. He was not embarrassed, nor even uncomfortable in the least. In fact, he responds with a true righteous indignation that exposes the disciples as woefully flawed. When it comes to (worship) responding to Christ, there is no offering (sacrifice) that is truly extravagant or over the top, because you cannot love Christ or serve Christ, or worship Christ too much. But you can certainly be stingy. You can certainly hold back and hold on, and keep, and defend and protect from giving over to Him, unless of course, you’ve truly experienced his grace. When you have truly experienced his grace, then no sacrifice is too great; especially praise that is costly and exhausting. Before we examine the text in detail, there is a second word I want you to consider. It is the word liturgy.

Liturgy has come to mean a formal, prescribed, and orderly religious ceremony. But, the root meaning of this word literally means, “the work of the people.” (laos – people; ergo – work) Liturgical worship is in its most basic meaning is the activity, the work, the energy, the expression, the involvement, and the engagement of the people (congregation) in the worship of God. Worship is not done for you. Nor is worship primarily done in private. Worship is the work, the response of the people to God. Worship is not a spectator sport. When speaking of worship, we, the congregation, are the choir. We are the participants. The pews are the platform and God is the audience. But, the platform extends beyond the pews to all of life and no appropriate response to his grace is truly extravagant.

This is critical for you to understand. It goes against the way many of us think. We live with so much media and entertainment that we are so tempted to think of ourselves as the judges, texting on our cell phones our likes or dislikes of the songs or sermon. We are not the judge! God is! We are the audience who is being judged. You are not the critic, God is, and what’s worse, he demands absolute perfection from the performance. He demands that you love him with all of your heart and all of your soul and with all of your mind and with all of your strength, because He is worth nothing less and to hold back anything would be offensive. And yet all that we can offer is damaged goods. We are offensive. That is why we need the Savior.

## 1. **True Worship is a Sacrificial Response to God.** (vertical) (15)

Therefore, our response to God is:

### A. **Christ-driven** (based on the sacrifice of Christ) “through him”

We cannot stand in the presence of God apart from Christ. It is through Christ alone that we can be forgiven, cleansed, purified, and justified. Only because of Christ, do we have the right and the invitation to be in his presence.

Cathi and I were driving around Northern Michigan and we kept coming upon these gated neighborhoods that had signs for people like me. The signs read, “Members Only.” In other words, you don’t belong here because you couldn’t even afford the taxes, much less the house payment. We were excluded because we do not have the resources needed to belong. Do you want to be invited to the President’s Birthday party? A ticket for the inner circle is only about \$36,000. Do you want to stand in the presence of God? The cost is staggering. The cost is an infinitely pure life, which you do not have. You are not even close. But, Christ has offered his life for you. It is of no cost to you, but of staggering cost to him. Since he “suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood” we not only go to him and identify with him, but we worship “through him” because it is only through him that we can worship. That is why we sing the gospel and read the gospel and pray the gospel and preach the gospel as an integral part of our worship. The gift of our salvation (God’s grace to us through Christ) is staggering in its price. It is impossible to calculate its worth. That is why, “Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small, love so amazing, so divine, DEMANDS my life, my soul, my all!”

### B. **Congregational** – “let us”

True worship is the activity of the community of believers. Unless you have been redeemed, you cannot worship. But, if you have been redeemed, then you are called to “offer up the sacrifice of praise” with “us”. This is not primarily a private matter. This is congregational. This is something that we do as a body because we are not complete without the body. Our worship is not all that it needs to be until we are in the context of the church. Congregational worship forces us to realize that there are more people in this world than us.

### C. **Continual** – “continually”

This means, that all of life is an act of worship. That means that our gathering as the body on Sunday is both the culmination of a week of responding to God by worshipping him in our work, in our leisure, in our family, in our reading, in our devotions, in our hobbies, and in all relationships as well as the beginning of another week before the face of God. Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we do for

the glory of God. We do in order to put the various aspects of the character of God on display. When we leave the gathering, worship is not done, it continues.

#### **D. Costly** – “sacrifice of praise”

I think that the way that we “do church” makes it very difficult for us to understand that our praise is to be a sacrifice, that is, it should cost us something that we gladly give up because we consider the exaltation of God with the body to be of higher value. But, what did it cost you to gather today? You didn’t sleep in as long as you felt like it? It’s not like the service begins at 6am! We are located in a convenient spot. We make the parking convenient, and even have parking attendants. We have heat in the winter, AC in the summer, padded pews, angled seating, readable bulletins, well-lit, and clean children’s areas, convenient restrooms, and convenient drinking fountains.

Today in China, believers will wait until night, to gather and when they do, they will only arrive at the designated place one or two at a time in order not to draw attention to their meeting. Most will walk. There are no nurseries, and children’s clubs. There are no snack times, parking lots, bulletins, web sites, or comfortable seating. There are not always enough copies of the Bible to go around. The people who gather tonight risk losing their jobs and their homes tomorrow. And yet, they choose to come. Their praise is costly, but it is in response to the grace that they have received.

This next phrase, “*that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name*” is a restatement, or a way of explaining what a sacrifice of praise looks like.

#### **E. Apparent** – “*fruit of lips*”

What is the fruit of lips? What do our lips produce? Words! Sounds! So, a sacrifice of praise is going to be expressive. We have the opportunity to speak to one another through psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. We have the opportunity to pray for one another, to read the Word together, to respond together, and to speak of God’s greatness. I am fully aware that not all of you are as expressive as others and that is fine. However, since we are responding to God, we should be the most expressive in the glad worship of God, than we are in anything else, since He is greater, and more glorious, and more gracious than anything else.

#### **F. Theologically Expansive** – “*that acknowledge his name*”

Please note this. It should be obvious. True worship starts with theology. It starts with an understanding of who God is and must grasp the totality of his being. That is why our response is marked by Praise (v.15) and by Reverance and Awe (12.28).

Imagine that you are standing at the ***base of a lighthouse*** that is being pounded by an enormous surge of water. You are in awe of the power of the water. You have

respect (reverence) for the storm and praise for the Lighthouse. The names of God reflect many of his attributes. I AM that I AM speaks of his immutability. He does not change. Sovereign speaks of his majestic reign. God speaks of him as Creator and Sustainer. Elohim, Adonai, Redeemer, Savior, are all like the various facets of a diamond that reflect different hues and colors of his glorious being. All together, the names of God speak of his totality. And the totality of God is known as his glory. That is why, in that final song we were charged to “Make our praises and songs glorious, make it wonderful, make it excellent, make it beautiful” and to do it with our hearts and souls, because it is in response to him and he deserves our very best. There is also a time to bow down, to be still, to be quiet, to be in awe. But the sacrifice of Christ, is not only the high octane racing fuel for our worship engines, it also informs and drives the way that we respond to each other.

2. **True Fellowship is a Sacrificial Response to each other.** (horizontal) (16)

Therefore, our reaction to one another is:

A. **Christ-driven** (based on the sacrifice of Christ)

Once again, our response to each other is to be gracious because God has been so incredibly gracious to us. As many of you say when asked, “How are you doing?”, you say – “Better than I deserve.” Because God has been so generous with me, and has given me more than I deserve, I can not only afford to be generous with others, but, I want to be generous with others.

B. **Commanded** – *“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have”*

Now, do you think that this is talking about money? Well certainly that is part of it, but think bigger. Last week, some of you shared your time and strength with a family in the church by helping them move. You did it generously (30 of you) and it was a wonderful joy for them and for you because you shared what you had and spent your time with others. When you take the time to talk with each other after the service is over, when you take the time to invest into each other’s lives, when you take the time to pray for one another, to write an encouraging note, to invite someone to eat with you, to invite someone into your home, or into your live, you are doing good and sharing what you have. Some of you look for people to invite over for the holidays. Some of you do that well, and many of us can do it even better.

Plan to obey this. Plan to talk to someone today. Rather than just leave, engage in conversation. Ask someone about how they were encouraged or challenged today. Share some of yourself. (e.g. *Hi, my name is Bob, I’m sorry, but I do not remember your name, but I want to, so I am going to keep asking you until I do. It really is good to see you again. I hope that you were encouraged today. Is there anything that my wife and I can pray for this week that you would share with me?*)

C. **Congregational** – *“share with what (y’all) have”*

The command is plural. This is a command for all of us. Think of this. Why do we have a Missions Team? Is it so that the rest of us do not need to concern ourselves with missions? Of course not! Why do we have greeters and ushers? So the rest of us can be cold, unfriendly, and downright rude – right? Why do we have a choir? Isn't because we can afford to subcontract our singing? This sharing (lit. fellowship) is something that is to be a characteristic of our entire congregation. That means that we must all plan to share with what we have. That is one of the major reasons why we, as people of the gospel, learn to live within our means. We want to have extra so that we can share. It is why we not make life too busy so we have time to spend on others. But sharing is not always convenient. In fact the text calls it a “sacrifice.”

**D. Costly** – *“for such sacrifices”*

Fellowship is costly. Like the grace of God it is costly. But, when we give sacrificially, give of that which is precious to us for the benefit of others, we are reflecting the gospel because that is what God did on an infinitely greater level. He gave of what was Most Valuable, Most Glorious, Most Precious, when he gave Christ in our place. So, when we give that which is costly to us in a generous response to God's grace in our lives, God is put on display and obviously he is well-pleased.

**E. God-pleasing** – *“pleasing to God”*

There is so much in this text that is counter-intuitive.

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<sup>i</sup> Title taken from Marva Dawn's excellent book on Worship

<sup>ii</sup> Mark 14.3-9 (also in Matthew 26 and John 12)