

Meditations of the Heart - Reflections on the Scriptures

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Pastor Matt Cadora

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Sermon Title: "Jesus' Audacious Delegation – Part II"

Luke 10:1-9

Many read this text and think the Lord is teaching his disciples to trust God to provide for them as they go on their journey. It is more accurate to read the Lord's words (in verses 4-8) as being concerned with being relevant to the indigenous culture of the villages in ancient Palestine.

Jesus never emphasizes that the apostles ought to trust and pray that God would provide them with a place to stay. Rather, He speaks with the assumption that the disciples will not have a problem in actually finding places to stay. It was a basic expectation of hospitality in that culture that a visitor to a village would find a place to stay with the locals in that village (which may help us to make more sense of why some of the disciples were so indignant at the earlier rejection they had received by not being given a place to stay in a Samaritan village).

Culturally speaking, however, it was also strategically advantageous for the spread of the gospel that the disciples stay in a local home for it was through the relationships with their hosts that they could develop relationships with others in the community and tell them about the gospel. And that's really not too dissimilar from our own culture. The Gospel is best spread through relationships, through investing yourself in peoples' lives, through giving of yourselves to others and, yes, even receiving from them.

Jesus never showed discomfort with anyone – regardless of who they were or what kind of life they led. That should be encouraging to us because I don't think Christians really want to feel a level of discomfort toward others either, but we've developed this bizarre notion that we don't have the freedom TO comfortably enjoy being around non-Christians. We didn't get that idea from Jesus. He put his disciples in situations where they had to develop relationships with others who are not like them.

We need to put ourselves in situations where we, too, interact with those who are not like us. But we also must be alert to some interpersonal dynamics going on. When Christians interact with people who do not believe the same things as us, we must recognize that people are looking for a reason to write you off - dismiss you. The addict looks for a reason to justify their pre-existing fears that, if you really knew about their life, you would self-righteously condemn them. The person who is turned off by the political views of many evangelical Christians is looking for a reason to write you off based upon how you might connect your politics to your view of Jesus.

So, when we bring up any number of ethical issues, we end up producing stumbling blocks for others that serve as barriers to deflect them away from Jesus. Not good. When Jesus instructs his disciples to "greet no one on the road", he is concerned that they be focused on their call to a sense of urgency and carry out the commission he has given them.

To quote C.S. Lewis' senior devil, Screwtape, in addressing a younger devil assigned to tempt a young Christian ambivalent about where he stands on the subject of war: *"Whatever he adopts, your main task will be the same. Let him begin by treating the Patriotism or the Pacifism as a part of his religion. Then let him, under the influence of partisan spirit, come and regard it as the most important part. Then quietly and gradually nurse him on to the stage at which the religion becomes merely part of the "Cause" in which Christianity is valued chiefly because of the excellent arguments it can produce in favor of the war-effort or of Pacifism. The attitude which you want to guard against is that in which temporal affairs are treated primarily as material for obedience. Once you have made the World your end and Faith a means, you have almost won your man, and it makes very little difference what kind of worldly end he is pursuing."*²

You've no doubt heard of the old axiom that Christians are to be 'in the world but not of the world'. Given that the idea is a matter that Jesus prays over in John 17 for His disciples, it is comforting to know that He anticipated we would struggle with keeping things in balance: ***"...they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. Just as encouraging is the fact that Jesus prayed for us as well as the apostles: 20 "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.***

So, how do we find that balance? We realize that, at a very basic level, non-Christians and Christians are quite alike. One recognizes his sinfulness and his need for mercy and believes he/she has received it. The other may not have the same recognition, but they have a longing for the same redemption. As Leo Bebb says in Frederick Buechner's novel, *The Book of Bebb*:

*"We all got secrets. I got them same as everybody else—things we feel bad about and wish hadn't ever happened. Hurtful things. Long ago things. We're all scared and lonesome, but most of the time we keep it hid. It's like every one of us has lost his way so bad we don't even know which way is home any more only we're ashamed to ask. You know what would happen if we would own up we're lost and ask? Why, what would happen is we'd find out home is each other. We'd find out home is Jesus that loves us lost or found or any whichway."*²

¹ Lewis, C.S. *The Screwtape Letters*, MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc. New York, NY, 1980, p. 35.

² Buechner, Frederick, *The Book of Bebb*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, CA, 1979, pp. 306-307.