

# 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.*

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Week of August 30, 2009

*Sermon: Jesus' Audacious Delegation ( Part III)*

**Luke 10:8-16**

As much as we have recently considered how audacious it was for Jesus to have delegated to his disciples the very proclamation of the arrival of the kingdom of God, the most audacious aspect of the whole matter is not the messengers, but the message that Jesus sent them out proclaim. The audacity behind the message can be boiled down to questions of authority and exclusivity about the Christian gospel. On what authority do Christians have to proclaim the gospel?

Lesslie Newbigin explains that *"the authority of Jesus is not a derived authority: it is the authority of God himself present in the midst of human history."* Newbigin's point is that the authority with which the Christian proclaims the gospel is based on a personal commitment to that authority that is claimed by Jesus. *"I am - in Pascal's famous phrase, wagering my life on the faith that Jesus is the ultimate authority. My answer is a confession: I believe... [T]he Christian is placing himself in a position like that of a scientist who affirms his belief in the truth of a statement in physics. All statements that claim to speak the truth about realities external to the speaker are affirmations of faith to which the speaker commits himself."*<sup>1</sup>

Krish Kandiah, Executive Director of Churches in Mission for the UK Evangelical Alliance, talks frequently about the Church's approach to apologetics. He stressed that there is certainly an intellectual component to the gospel message. *"Faith is not a blind leap. It is trust in the evidence you have collected."* But by that, he doesn't necessarily mean some convincing intellectual argument or theoretical proof that 'demands a verdict'. *"When it comes to apologetics, we need to agree that there isn't knock-down proof."* "Sometimes", Kandiah says, *"the reason for the hope we have is that I saw a change in someone's life. I saw a change and He answered me."*<sup>2</sup>

What must never be forgotten when it comes to Christian apologetics (also defined as 'the act of giving a reason for the hope we have') is that faith is the means by which we take hold of what is proclaimed in the gospel. Following Christ is a step of faith. It is wagering one's life based upon the person of Jesus Christ and entering into a community of people (the Church) who hold to and cherish that same faith. It is a confession that reproduces: the confession "Jesus is Lord" implies a commitment to make that same proclamation in our world.

As audacious as the message is, Jesus speaks in terms of judgment with regard to those who reject the message about the kingdom of God that Jesus gives the disciples to proclaim. Most Christians don't know what to do with this... As much as Jesus has given his disciples (that includes us) the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel, He has certainly not given us the responsibility of being the Judge! But that is precisely the role that many Christians seem compelled to take on. One of the reasons why Jesus sends his disciples out to proclaim the gospel is that the disciples themselves are recipients of the mercy of God! No Christian is ever in a position to speak of the Gospel without doing so from the perspective of one who has been

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<sup>1</sup> Newbigin, Lesslie, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995, pp. 14-15.

<sup>2</sup> Kandiah, Krish, *Engaging Atheism*, Evening Lecture Series at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, June 3, 2009.

delivered from what they, as a sinner, deserved. Yes, the Gospel is *called* good news, but it can't possibly BE good news unless there is some preexisting bad news that the Gospel is meant to deal with. It's the bad news - the fact that we could never stand before God based on our own goodness or righteousness - that the good news of the Gospel addresses.

God has given us a way out from under His wrath based on what He has mercifully done on our behalf. The good news of the Gospel is that God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us, so that now we might be saved by His death from the wrath of God (Romans 5:8). There is no question in God's mind of what we deserve, but because Christ on the cross has suffered the very wrath of God that we deserve, there is now no question in God's infinite mind of your righteousness – because Christ has given His righteousness to those who have wagered their life upon His words. If you have wagered your life on the faith that Jesus has done what the Scriptures tell us He has done on our behalf, then your hope is in the belief that Christ Himself has ransomed you from a terrible predicament the likes of which you could never have escaped from by your own doing.

In his book The Reason For God, Tim Keller puts forth the question that so many in our society ask, *"How can a God of love also be a God filled with wrath and anger? If he is loving and perfect, he should forgive and accept everyone. He shouldn't get angry."* But, as Keller points out, *"the Bible shows us that God's wrath flows from his love and delight in his creation. He is angry at evil and injustice because it is destroying its peace and integrity."*<sup>3</sup>

The issue of judgment is not something that many Christians are too knowledgeable about, let alone comfortable discussing or even studying! C.S. Lewis gives a succinct explanation that correlates well with what we read in Luke 10 – where Jesus speaks about those who receive the message of the kingdom and also about those who reject the message of the kingdom.

*"There are only two kinds of people – those who say 'Thy will be done' to God or those to whom God in the end says, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell choose it. Without that self-choice, it would not be Hell."*<sup>4</sup> In other words, Lewis writes that Hell is *"the greatest monument to human freedom."* *"It is not a question of God sending us to hell. In each of us, there is something growing which will BE Hell unless it is nipped in the bud."*<sup>5</sup> By that, Lewis means that a person's desire for independence from God causes them to demand being in a situation in which God, in the end, gives them what they most want – which is freedom from God, which is ultimately what Hell is. So, to return to Tim Keller, *"hell is simply one's freely chosen identity apart from God on a trajectory into infinity."*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Keller, Tim, The Reason For God, Dutton, New York, NY, 2008, p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis, C.S. [As quoted in Keller's The Reason For God, p. 78-79], The Problem of Pain, (MacMillan, 1961), p. 116; The Great Divorce, (MacMillan, 1963), p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis, C.S. [As quoted in Keller's The Reason For God, p. 79] This is a compilation of quotes from three Lewis sources: Mere Christianity (MacMillan, 1964), p. 59; The Great Divorce (MacMillan, 1963), pp. 71-72, "The Trouble With X," in God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics (Eerdmans, 1970), p. 155.

<sup>6</sup> Keller, p. 78.