

# 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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*Sermon Series: The Mission of God    Sermon: The Strength of Weakness in the Reign of God*

**Philippians 1:3-14** **3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. 12 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. 14 And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.**

In my former career, I worked as part of the support staff team for the man who was President of BellSouth's operations for the state of Georgia. His name was Carl. Carl was a good man to work for and he made those around him feel valued in the work they did. One of the things I learned early on was that it was important for us to keep Carl constantly informed on things that were going on in the business. When it came to broad industry matters, Carl could be an information junkie, excitedly feasting on reams of data that gave him an insight into seeing the big picture of the telecommunications business and the economy. On the other hand, Carl liked knowing little details, too. He didn't like 'being left in the dark' about something. He truly desired to have a good rapport with his employees at all levels. In this regard, the challenge was in keeping him necessarily informed – especially as it concerned internal matters - without overwhelming him with needless details. Not having the time for minutiae, Carl wanted one page documents from us on various matters that listed what he needed to know in bullet point form. He wanted something that was simple, easy to read, and that would tell him the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW and WHY of the matter at hand.

Those categories are actually an implicit formula for how we have been looking at the kingdom and mission of God. By way of review, in week one, we looked at the WHO – WHOSE mission is it? And, of course, as we saw in week one, the mission belongs to God – even when God's Church – the instrument which God uses (amazingly) to carry out His mission in this world. What's amazing about it?

What's amazing about it is that God is in the business of redeeming and reconciling sinners to Himself and his plan to do that involves using those same sinners (including us) as the means by which His word is proclaimed around the world. This is part of what Jesus was talking about when he said, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.**" (John 14:12).

Jesus could say that because He was sending His Spirit to be with us. Of course, if God is going to use sinful people to accomplish His divine purposes, then one thing we can be sure of is that God's people are not always going to understand God's mission. In fact, God's people may sometimes develop missions and agendas of their own that are in contradiction to God's plan. [And God, in His infinite wisdom, knew this before He ever commissioned His people – to proclaim the gospel. We saw this in the early church's resistance to seeing Gentiles respond to the Gospel. But Gentiles did respond to the gospel and the Jewish Christians of the early church could only make the conclusion: *who were they to stand in God's way? [Acts 11:1-18]* All because the mission of the Church belonged to God. That's the WHO of the mission of God – WHO does the mission of God belong to? It belongs to God and therefore, the burden for carrying out God's mission lies, ultimately, on God's shoulders.

Then there's the HOW of the mission of God. The HOW is through weakness. You may have already gathered that much from the consideration that God uses His redeemed to carry the gospel to the ends of the world. But it started even in how God Himself came in human flesh to this world: *"the coming of Jesus has introduced into history an event in which the reign of God is made known under the form of weakness and foolishness to those to whom God has chosen to make it known, and that it made known to them so it may be proclaimed to all"*<sup>2</sup> (Lesslie Newbigin) That element of weakness continued in the Apostle Paul's circumstances being under house arrest in Rome. As he alluded to in his letter to the Philippian church, many were coming to faith through Paul's circumstances and many were emboldened to proclaim the gospel right in the heart of the Roman Empire that was so threatened by and opposed to the Gospel. And so that element of weakness continues in how God uses His Church today – even in suffering, even in persecution, even in ways we would never design in our own minds. I want to say "even in ways we would never expect" but Jesus specifically DID tell us to expect suffering and hardship on behalf of the Gospel [John 14-16].

So, where do we go from here? This coming week, we will consider the WHEN – WHEN is the mission of God carried out? The answer might seem easy (you say, "Right now!"). You would be right. But our understanding of that answer and all it entails is bound to have some inadequacies in each age and generation of the Church until the Lord returns. We'll explore that a bit this coming Sunday morning, as it pertains to our own times ...

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<sup>1</sup> Newbigin, Lesslie, *The Open Secret*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995, p. 37.