
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

July 19, 2015

“Therefore, if you worship me, it will all be yours.”
Luke 4:7 (Common English Bible)

Catherine Cavazos Renken, Presbyterian pastor and friend, recently posted on Facebook a page from a Christian inspirational calendar, presumably one that she had used in a previous year. The Bible selection for Thursday, July 3rd reads, *“Therefore, if you worship me, it will all be yours.”* It was an unfortunate selection by the publishers of the daily calendar. As Catherine notes in her posting, “Inspirational Bible Quote Less Inspirational If You Know Who Said It.” A cursory reading of this verse in the Bible quickly makes apparent that these words are spoken by Satan to Jesus – a small portion of Satan’s temptation of Jesus while Jesus was on a mountaintop in prayer.

Removed from context, nearly anyone can use selected scripture to advance their own political position, ideology or religious convictions. Scripture is used to bar women from leadership in the church, was used to support slavery and often used to discriminate against anyone who fails to hold a particular – and narrow – interpretation of God’s word. It seems to me that such use of the Bible is less concerned with advancing God’s Kingdom and more concerned with advancing the kingdom of the individual. As that great teacher of the faith, Paul Tillich once remarked, “The Bible is God’s word not when you think you can grasp it but when you allow it to grasp you.”

The question becomes, on whose terms do we seek to interpret the Bible – the Bible or ours? Critical study and interpretation of the Bible in its historical and cultural context is often dismissed if conclusions differ with cherished notions of understanding. Bumper stickers that declare, “The Bible says it, I believe it, end of conversation” often betray a mind closed to deeper insights of an authentic and genuine witness of the Bible. Surely, such persons wouldn’t apply a literal interpretation to Psalm 137:9, “A blessing on the one who seizes your children and smashes them against the rock!”

Present in the fifth chapter of Acts there is a Pharisee and teacher of the faith named Gamaliel, well respected by all the people. He is present when the early apostles of the Christian faith are being ridiculed and harassed due to their teaching and preaching of the risen Christ. Simply, the apostles’ interpretation of the faith is rejected. The “religious establishment” of the day was furious at the apostles and wanted to kill them. Gamaliel urged restraint – “what if the apostles are right? You will then find yourselves fighting God!” His counsel is sound today. Perhaps more civility in our speech and humility of heart would be wise as we consider the reading – and hearing – of God’s word today by those who stand in a different place than us.

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