

Putting Imagination into Worship

When Jesus was asked what was the great commandment in the law, He quoted Deuteronomy 6:5, *“And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”* Our Lord’s words in the New Testament as found in Mark 12:30 read as follows: *“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.”* If you notice in the New Testament our Lord has added one word not found in the Old Testament and that word is “mind.” This wording is repeated in Matthew 22:37 and Luke 10:27. This becomes a most fascinating study as well as curious addition. The word “mind” is from the Greek word “dianoia” which is defined as: deep thought, properly, the faculty (mind or its disposition), by implication, its exercise:-- imagination, mind, understanding.

Thayer adds this definition: way of thinking and feeling. Please make note, “mind” is not just referring to the muscle of the brain, but rather how the brain is used, the exercise of it, the way it is used in imagination. In a word, it appears that Jesus is saying, use your imagination when you love me!

1. The imagination takes us back to the mind of a child.

I would ask all adults reading this: do you remember the fine use of your childhood imaginations? I would ask the men: do you remember playing war that was so real you could almost here the bullets or arrows passing by? I would ask the ladies: do you remember spending whole afternoons in a castle as a princess? There is power in the imagination of a child. Grimm’s fairy tales and Hans Christian Anderson are as popular today as when they were written, in some cases maybe more so. Think about how much of the entertainment of our country is founded upon childhood imagination. Consider Disney’s capitalistic enterprises of Disneyland and Disneyworld. Guess what one of our deacons brought me from Disneyworld a couple of years ago? He brought me a Davey Crocket coonskin hat. I proudly display it in my office and if asked, I will put it on my bald and white haired head just as though I were Davey going after bears or Indians on a rampage. Why do we keep having remakes of Cinderella and other princess-type fairy tales? It is because no matter what age a lady may become, she can always quickly revert to her lifetime role as a princess.

The Bible records Jesus saying, *“...Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them”* (Mark 10: 14b-16). A child is so trusting. I recall once when I was in college, a young boy came with his church group to visit our campus and was assigned to our dorm. Not trying to be malicious, but in good humor and fun, my dorm mates and I decided to make up a scenario of a dragon who lived in what we affectionately called the Dead Sea, which was in truth, simply a pond. The boy’s eyes got bigger and bigger as one college friend after another affirmed a sighting of “the dragon.” The boy never questioned if dragons still existed or if the pond isn’t a little small to be the home of this loch ness behemoth. When the

youngster finally commented, he asked, “What color is it?” In other words, his youthful imagination was in full orb. In all my school years from first grade until graduation from high school I met only one schoolmate who questioned the reality of God. Even then, I discovered that this young lady had parents who were atheists and they taught their daughter this treachery. It’s not until we enter our college years and adulthood that we begin to question the validity of our faith. Sometimes the greatest antidote to unbelief is not becoming more versed in apologetics, but becoming more child-like. In other words more trusting like a child. A child by nature believes, this is why most of the baptisms in our church are of kids. To not believe is to go against the very nature of desiring belief that is placed inside us at conception. John 1:9 says, *“That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”* I would say to all unbelievers and fellow Christians who have developed a cynical skepticism, don’t let this unbelieving world put the light of your imagination out!

2. The imagination is the seat of worship.

Ezekiel was asked by God to observe the worship chamber of the ancient men of Israel, *“And he said unto me, Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here. So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, pourtrayed upon the wall round about”* (Ezekiel 8:9, 10). Then God revealed to His prophet what he was seeing, *“Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth”* (Ezekiel 8:12). Ezekiel was peering into the inner place of worship, the imagination of the mind!

The Old Testament rituals of worshipping in the Tabernacle and Temple were shadows of that which was to come in the New Testament, soon to be replaced by spiritual reality. Jesus was pointing out to the woman at the well that no longer would it be Jerusalem, Samaria or any certain place as the seat of worship. He said, *“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him”* (John 4:23). Later in His ministry our Lord said, *“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”* (Matthew 18:20). From this we can see why Jesus added the word “mind” or imagination to the concept of the great commandment. He was saying, no longer will we have props such as lavers, or menorahs, or curtains to stir our imagination – we will have the very person of Christ abiding in us via the Holy Spirit and now we should, *“Let this mind be in you (us), which was also in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 2:5). It is no accident in this New Testament age that the churches that have departed from the emphasis of a personal relationship with Christ have the icons, bells and smells of a type of worship that was done away by the cross and resurrection.

3. The imagination is the beginning place of faith.

Having said what we did in the previous point, II Corinthians 10:5 takes on a whole new meaning, *“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing*

that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (II Corinthians 10:5). We need to throw down our props as idols that in a very lame way take the place of true spiritual worship and exercise our God-given imagination to worship the Lord Jesus Christ. Not to be unkind to our friends, but in the spirit of John Knox, John Huss and Hugh Latimer I say, “Throw down your rosary, the icons you made of the saints and heathen worship of the bread and wine that has made you gluttonous and drunkards of transubstantiation idolatry!” Moving from the religious world to the secular world, I would say to our friends, throw down your stuff of materialistic substitutes, your fellowman or even yourself from the center point of your imagination! Instead, place Jesus in the focal point of your imagination and believe on and worship Him. Jesus said, “...Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed...” (Mark 4: 30b-31a). Belief is taking the seed of imagination and positing it in Jesus. He, by grace will give the spiritual life that is necessary. “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12).

-Pastor Pope-