

RUMINATIONS OF A FORMER HEATHEN

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Isaiah chapter 5, verses 1 and 2: “Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:

And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and he built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.”

The choicest vine in a fruitful hill, all fence protected, the stones removed to soften the ground so that roots could deepen. He gave this vine the best possible conditions for it to take root and grow. What more could he have done that he didn't do? With all the care he put into his vineyard, he should have gotten good sweet grapes instead of bad grapes; he even built a winepress in expectation of some good wine. What did he get for all that care? He got inedible grapes, certainly no good for wine, probably immature and sour. What would you do to that vineyard? Isaiah 5: 5 and 6, says what he was going to do; “And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard; I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down,

And I will lay it waste, it shall not be pruned nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command that the clouds rain no rain upon it.”

The vineyard was unfruitful and it was destroyed. The vineyard was unfruitful in that it did not produce good grapes. It produced something but it was not good grapes. The question is, how good does the fruit have to be to be accepted? How good does the fruit have to be to not be destroyed? Is it fruitful enough to recognize God for who he is? The Saviour, The Rock, the one who can be trusted because he never changes. That first flash of recognition, that, becomes seared, etched in the mind, even when the understanding is just beginning. He so longs for us to be saved that he will impute righteousness to our smallest move toward him. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, but the fear of God also reveals, at the same time, his profound, almost inexplicable, love for us.

As far as being good grapes is concerned, there is never an end of our praise and thanks to him, which is our sweetness to him. God made wine to make the heart of man merry. He wants the merriness of those good grapes, of our thanks and love back to him. A humble and contrite heart he will not despise, from humble and contrite to thankful and praiseful is but a step, is all sweetness to him.

There is a division in humanity, a terrible and great division. It is the division between the saved and the unsaved. The saved are those who are inside the refuge and the unsaved are those who are not inside the refuge. Many of those who are not inside the refuge would like to be inside the refuge but they have no idea where that refuge is, they have not yet found it. The refuge, of course, is Christ, our Kinsman Redeemer. The refuge is double-sided as well, it is the refuge from the lake of fire but it is also the refuge into eternal life, eternal life, think about it hard. The prospect of eternal life is what makes this life fuller to live. For those who do not expect eternal life, this life is miserable, lived in a hurry to get all that they can. Ultimately, terrifying. What a terrible prospect it is to die, even just die without any suffering, forget the suffering in hell that could be super-bad, but just be snuffed out like a candle? I don't want to hear it, I want to live and not die.

God's people are the saved, the heathen are the unsaved. Who are the heathen? The heathen are those who do not know the God of the Bible or who are in rebellion against the God of the Bible. Yet, the heathen, absolutely, positively, no doubt about it, can become God's people at any time (even in their last breath) and be saved out of the consuming fire. The thief on the cross is an example. He was not very far from death when he got saved.

Every religion in the world knows that the price for sin is death. A great sacrifice, a death has to happen to pay for sin. In certain religions the sacrifice is the sacrifice of one's own instincts, appetites. Asceticism, mortification (killing) of the flesh, is a gradual death, giving up desire to become less sinful. Or, plain killing, like the Canaanites did killing children. But the killing of children also happens in religions of people in the most isolated places of the world. The collective unconscious of humanity knows that the price for sin is death; everyone knows that they fall short of the demands of the deity, whatever they imagine that deity to be. The offering of a child, supposedly pure and undefiled, to pay for sins and be accepted by God, shows that humans everywhere have the consciousness that "the soul that sinneth it shall die" Ezekiel 18:4 and 18:20.

So, what is there to say to the heathen? I know the heathen, they are all my cousins. I was a heathen for most of my life. It depends which group of heathen one is talking to. Among the heathen there is also a division. One is a deist, the other atheist. The deist believes in a deity or deities of some sort, spirits and the like; the atheist does not believe in the existence of anything like God or an invisible world. There may be some variants of those two but that's basically it.

In the group of deists one finds people who believe there is a God, somewhere. There must be a supreme being somewhere, a thing, something, a being of some sort that created all of this, matter and the world, life. However, even though this God, this entity, may exist, "it" is not exclusive to any one religion. This God is definitely not the God of the Bible, because the God of the Bible is too narrow, too exclusive, they say. The Bible is just one of many books on religion, etc. The Hindus have good things to say, and the Buddhists, and the Muslims, Zoroastrians and many others. God has appeared to different peoples, at different times, in different parts of the world and all religions share some basic good things. It's all the same God. So, if you behave in accordance to a common denominator, you will probably be just fine. This a popular thought nowadays. God, if there is one, is just too big to be in only one religion. As long as you do a little bit of this and a little bit of that you'll be O.K. Burn a little incense, be kind to people, light a candle, meditate, you know the shtick.

There is a distinction between ignorance and open rebellion. To the group who simply says there is no God, that there is no supernatural being who created this material world, one would have to ask: By what means is the world here? It's hard to kick against the Laws of Thermodynamics. It is harder to sustain the position of the atheist than that of the deist. The atheist is the person who does not believe that a being outside of known nature created everything. One of the problems the atheist faces is that we cannot create matter nor can we destroy it. That's a terrible constraint. The postulation of the atheist is that matter appeared somehow, out of nothing, all by itself. The idea of something coming out of nothing has to be the in-your-face rebellion. Stubbornness and rebellion are with us from the very beginning of consciousness. First Samuel, chapter 15, verse 23 says: "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness as iniquity and idolatry." Idolatry and witchcraft are ultimate sins. Rebellion and stubbornness are equivalent to those ultimate sins. Rebellion and stubbornness against God are

as bad as anything a human being can do. What will happen in the day of death, to where does a person flee for refuge? The God of the Bible is jealous, don't mess with his passion.

Another notion is that the universe itself is eternal and this is all there is, this is all that ever was, and this is all that forever shall be. The universe was caused by the Big Bang and the Big Bang itself is repetitive. All matter eventually is sucked in to a giant black hole and it emerges on the other side as another Big Bang. This universe and all life in it are part of a very long, eternal, repetitive process. Life could be a product of chance or it could also be a repetitive process. Get some proteins, some carbon, a little of this, a little of that, a bolt of lightning and that's your first cell. From inorganic to organic in a jump. Easy. In the beginning, there was chaos but chaos evolved into order. Evolution of chaos into order has never been observed, but no matter. All the information for every possible form of life was contained, or had to be, in that first cell. Otherwise, it would mean that information continued to increase out of nowhere. Information appeared for higher forms of being without a source for that information. Information went upward instead of downward, and information was never lost in transmission. Or, nobody knows how it happened. But we are working on it, one of these days we will know exactly how it happened. But it wasn't God, no, no, there is another explanation, we just haven't figured it out yet. The problem is with the Laws of Thermodynamics. These Laws are just like the Law of Gravity. We did not invent these laws, they just are. We only discovered them and gave them a name. The First Law of Thermodynamics totally negates the possibility of something coming out of nothing. The Second Law of Thermodynamics totally negates the possibility of chaos becoming orderly, or of information not lost in transmission, it is entropy, everything decays, order descends into chaos, information is lost (garbled) in transmission.

How long can we deny God? We can deny him all the way to our last breath. God has given us the capacity to say no, the capacity for unbelief, the capacity for total rebellion. As far as I am concerned, that is not a terribly good thing. The chances to go to hell seem bigger than the chances to go to Heaven. He has given us the capacity to be hard, hard, toward him. But God is also ready to pardon all the way to our last breath. To the heathen you say, pay attention, and come home before your last breath.