

The Voice of Reason

by A.W. Tozer

The Christian message is according to reason, taking into account all facts, and it emphasizes the importance of recognizing reality, turning away from sin, and intending to reform and live right.

Duration: 38:56

Scripture: Isaiah 1:16

Topics: "Reason"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the power of the gospel to transform lives. He acknowledges that many of the hymns we sing were written by individuals who were once evil and in bondage, but were set free by the gospel. The preacher highlights the importance of immediate action and doing the will of God. He also discusses the lost condition of mankind and the love of God for humanity. The sermon emphasizes that the gospel is not just a belief, but a fact supported by the Bible and the countless lives that have been changed by it.

Transcript

This will be the second in the series of Voices That Intrigue Us. First of Isaiah, verses 16 to 20. The Holy Ghost is speaking through the mouth of his servant Isaiah.

Wash you, make you clean. Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do well.

Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

Come now, verse 18, let us reason together, saith the Lord. Reason has many meanings, and there are many facets to it, but we think here of a wise recognition of things as they really are. The reasonable man doesn't want to be fooled, and he doesn't want to walk about in a glow of imagination.

He wants to know things as they are, and Christians of all persons are the true realists. Now, this sounds strange, perhaps, because we lie under the shadow of the charge that we are unreal, or that we engage in

reality, and that Christian conversion is a flight from reality. Now, let's look at that for a little bit.

Christians, I repeat, are of all persons the true realists, because the true Christian insists upon stripping things down to the hard core of reality. He wants to know the truth as it really is. He wants to know about his life.

He doesn't want to be played with. He wants to know about sin, whether it is and what it is, and how he can get rid of his. He wants to know about his relation to God, about his possible relation to God and his real, actual relation to God.

He wants to know where he stands, with respected judgment to come. He wants to know about heaven. He wants to know about hell.

He is a realist in the right sense of the word. Now, the worldling, not the Christian, is the unrealistic person, because the worldling must pretend all of his lifetime. He must be an actor all as long as he lives, because he has to act as if he were not going to die, all the time knowing that he is going to die.

He has to act as if sin were nothing, and at the same time lie under the lash of conscience about his sin. He worries about it, and he knows, if he knows anything, that the whole world worries about sin. They worry about it in every Christian, every culture there is, as well as in the Christian culture.

They worry about it in the Ballym Valley, and they worry about it in the jungles of South America, and they worry about it in the jungles of Chicago and Toronto, and they worry about it everywhere. He wants to know about it, and he insists upon knowing about it. But the worldling, that is, the Christian does, but the worldling knows these things, but he doesn't do anything about it.

He knows it, but he knows he's guilty, and still he must act as if he didn't know he was guilty. He's got to close his eyes and pretend to not see and cover up all his lifetime to stay sane. He has to hide and disguise and conceal and act apart, I repeat, contrary to fact and contrary to reason and contrary to truth.

And it's not the worldling that says, I want to know the truth, it is the Christian that says, I want to know the truth. It is not the worldling that says, I want to know reality, it is the Christian that says, I want to know reality. I want to get back to real existence, to things as they are.

And he presses to it, insists upon knowing it. Now, the Christian message is according to reason. I'd like to have you get that.

It's a very odd thing that I should pick up a magazine that I hadn't seen before after coming down here just tonight to the office, stepped in there and saw a little manila envelope with my name on it. I opened it and found a magazine, and in it there was a very fine review of the book *The Knowledge of the Holy*. It was quite what they call a rave review, really, and I'm glad it's getting among students, for it was an intervarsity review.

Three paragraphs were spent saying that the book was better than I thought it was, and then one paragraph saying that it was one unfortunate thing about the book that I was anti-intellectual. Well, I'm not anti-intellectual. The truth is, I believe that Christian message is altogether according to reason, because the Christian message takes into account all of the facts and nothing else does.

No other philosophy dare look at all the facts. Nobody does dare look at all the facts, but the gospel of Christ and the whole New Testament message takes into account all of the facts, and whatever takes in all of the facts can't possibly be anti-reason or anti-intellectual. The Christian message takes in the fact of God, and I want you to know that that is the most important question that can face the world this hour.

Not whether Khrushchev is going to explode another bomb or not, not that. Not whether there's going to be another election in Canada within another few weeks, not that. Not whether the dollar goes up or down, not whether we find a cure for cancer.

Those things are important, and I wouldn't be so unrealistic as to say they're not important. I know they are, but I also know that compared with the great question of God Almighty and our relation to God, they're nothing at all. They're child's play compared with the mighty, overwhelming question of God.

The Christian message deals with that question first of all, and primarily it deals with God and man. I want to know about man. I want to know about myself.

Who am I, and where did I come from, and what's my responsibility here, and where am I going from here, and why did I come here in the first place? I want to know about that. I don't know any branch of science that will tell me, and I don't know any philosophy in the world that will tell me. But I know that there was a man who walked in this world who was God by what the theologians called the hypostatic union, the union of all the nature of God with all the nature of man.

He said, I came from above, I saw and heard all these things with my Father, and I come and I speak them unto you. Christianity deals with this man and with what this man had to say about man. Then I repeat, Christianity deals with sin and man's accountability for sin, and it deals with judgment.

If there is going to be what the English call the greatest eyes, and what John Wesley called the greatest eyes, if there is to be the greatest eyes, that is, the great judgment, I want to know about that judgment. God has given me a ship and made me captain of it, and has said, Now here, you sail out there on the ocean of your life, but you're going to have to report to me, for I am the owner. I want to know about that.

I don't want to go sailing around as though I were having a nice time on a June afternoon. I want to know where I am to go. I want my orders, as they used to say.

When a man pulled a train, pulled in, and somebody rushed out and gave the engineer what they called a flimsy. On that flimsy was written, onion skin paper, was written his orders. He had to follow those orders, or else there would be a train wreck out there, and people would be killed.

And if God Almighty has given me orders, if he's given me a flimsy, if he said to me, Now you bring her in on time, and bring her into such and such a station, all goods intact, and all cargo and all freight safe, I want to know that. If I'm going to be judged for it, and if I'm going to have to answer to somebody for my life, I want to know about it. I want to know about the shortness of life, and the deceitfulness of appearances.

And Christianity takes into account all of these things. Christianity, in place of being a pink and white candy-cotton dream, Christianity insists that appearances are deceitful. And of course, in doing that, it cuts across television, and magazines, and packaging, and beauty parlors, and beauty contests, and all the rest.

Because the philosophy of modern civilization is, it doesn't make any difference what it is, it's what it looks like that counts. Maybe I mentioned this once before, but I was one time on a train, and they'd held it up a half an hour. A whole trainload of people, one of the big, important trains in the New York Center, held it up for a half an hour because an actress was going to get on, and she was late.

After a half an hour's delay in the station, we started out. I forgot about the girl, that is, after they told me they were waiting on an actress. I just looked sour and forgot it.

But pretty soon I went into the diner, and here sat a young woman. Somebody whispered to me, that's so-and-so, she was an actress. She was sitting with a man, either her husband or secretary, I don't know which.

Didn't talk at all, just sat there and ate, looked bored, both of them. And I thought, well, if he hadn't got very much, if that's the famous, wonderful actress, the clothes, horse, and the beauty, I can't see it. Then I wasn't supposed to, so I ate and went out.

Then I went back to my car and sat down and picked up the newspaper. And there in the newspaper was my girl. There she was, showed her as she was when she was to appear before the footlights.

And brother, you wouldn't know her at all. She was a waltzing dream, all in fluffy clothes that went out all directions, and lights went from her, and she was something really not to see. But I'd just seen her, and she didn't look like that at all, you see.

Now, the world lives for that. They don't care what kind of a mudfinch she is when she gets up in the morning. If you can fix her up and make her look pretty, then they'll pay to get me in to see the deception.

But the real Christian says, this is not my life, this is not the way I live. I do not live by color and sound and pretense and masks. I want to live by reality.

I want to know whether this thing is true or not. I want to know how it looks when it peels down to reality. The Christian message, I say, is according to truth and according to reason, and it takes in all the facts.

Now, God being who he is and what he is, there are mysteries that transcend reason, and there isn't any use to try to deny that. It's a total impossibility for me to grasp everything, or for you or for Plato for that matter, or Einstein. It can't be done.

But while there are mysteries that transcend reason, there is nothing in Christian message that violates reason. Reason is never violated by the Christian message, but reason cannot grasp it all. But what it can grasp, it supports.

And sound reason, reason that is not driven into a corner and forced to lie, real reason kneels in reverence before the glory of the Christian message. So, come now, let us reason together, is the voice of Christ entreating us with a voice of reason. And he bases his entreaty upon reasonable consideration.

Come now, let us reason together. He bases it upon this reasonable consideration, our lost condition. Our lost condition is not a dogma, though I certainly am not in any way afraid to declare that I believe certain dogmas.

I do not believe a dogma because the Pope says it, and I do not believe a dogma because some council declared it contrary to scripture. But I believe a dogma, if by that you mean something that is just too true

to be denied. And our lost condition is therefore one of those facts, too true to be denied, and yet it's a reasonable thing, not something I'm asked to believe, but something that I can't help but believe because it's all around about me.

We're lost, we people are lost. Everywhere we're lost, and I suppose there never was a time I picked up a magazine that I rarely read, Look Magazine, published in the States, and I saw in it something by Barry Goldwater on conservatism in the States, so I thought I'd spend 15 or 20 cents on it, and I didn't take it home. And in it I found an article that I didn't like at all.

The article said, Is Law and Order Breaking Down in America? And it gave the terrible spine-tingling and blood-chilling story of New York and Chicago and San Francisco and Denver, how the hoodlums are not only abroad committing their crimes, but when the police try to arrest them, the citizens jump on the police. And they told the places, I've never walked in Central Park in New York, never was in it, but once in my life, not only briefly and on the edge, though I go to it within a few blocks of it, every once in a while, and they say that there are places where you simply do not dare go out, that if you go out you're going to get beaten up or stabbed or shot or something else. Law and Order Breaking Down.

And it's not the hoodlums and the beatniks, but the common citizen who's on the side of crime instead of on the side of the law. Now, God Almighty comes along and tells us that man is wicked and all sinful and all the imagination of his heart sinful continually, and then I look out and I read something like this, and I say, this is true, God, it's true, not only true because you said it, but it's obvious everywhere around about me that it's true. So, the voice of reason is saying, now listen, my appeal to you is because of the lost condition of mankind, and then the redeeming work of Christ is not a dogma merely, but it is also a fact, and the love of God is also a fact, and the Spirit's presence is a fact, and the power of the gospel is a fact, the mighty power of the gospel is a fact, that everything is passing and perishing, and that only the will of God abides.

Dear Moody had for his life text, He that doeth the will of God abideth forever, and the importance of immediate action. All of these are reasonable things. They do not violate human reason, they're not something you're stampeded into believing.

There they are. Man's lost condition is plain, and the love of God for men is there declared, and all thousands who have accepted that love have proved it to be true, and the power of the gospel is declared by the Bible and confirmed a thousand, thousand times in the lives of men who have come and have been delivered. I have seen them myself, you've seen them, we know about them.

We sing some of the songs written by men, and some of those men we look upon them now as saints, but we forget or don't know that one time they were evil men, vile men in bondage, and the power of the gospel set them free. That's a reasonable thing. The Bible sets up as its dark background against which it paints its glorious picture of hope, and says, change and decay in all around thy seed.

Everything is passing. That's reasonable. You can confirm that by looking out anywhere.

Now I notice here in this text a stern voice. It is the voice of exhortation, and I notice a gentle voice, and it is the voice of invitation. The voice of exhortation says, Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes.

Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow, and then come and let us reason together. The stern voice of exhortation has the gracious voice of promise following it, and these two are joined in reason's ear.

It is perfectly reasonable that if I'm going to talk to God about getting delivered from my scarlet sins and washed from my crimson iniquities, that I'm going to have to begin by washing myself, cleansing, and putting away evil doings, and learning to do well, and seeking judgment. Once again I'm conscious that the doctrine of grace overemphasized and misunderstood and misapplied in this generation has made preaching like this to be a highly unpopular kind of preaching, for people do not want to be told that there is something to do. They want to be told that Jesus did it all on the cross, and all I have to do is accept him and go my way.

There never was a greater trap laid for the feet of men than that. It is filling hell every day, because the Bible does not tell us that I can go on in my sinful way and still go to heaven if I believe in Jesus. It doesn't tell me that grace is some magic that will take a man who continues and persists in iniquity, and will get him ready for heaven and take him off, and clamp him down in heaven and put a golden harp in his hand and say, Now it's yours forever, not by a long shot, my dear friends.

It says here, Wash you and make you clean, and put away the evil of your doings, and learn to do well, and then come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord. The great soul injury is dividing these two voices, the voice of exhortation from the voice of invitation. When we preach constantly on the voice of invitation, come unto me, come unto me, but we forget.

Before I can travel south, I've got to turn my back on the north. Before I can be clean, I must turn my back upon a filth. Before I can go right, I must turn my back upon wrong.

Before I can walk with God, I must turn my back on the devil. And before I can be sure of heaven, I must turn my back on the world. This is so obvious that I wonder why anybody would ever argue about it, and yet it's being argued about all the time.

It's filled the churches with deceived church members, and it's helped to fill hell with deceived souls. The great moral impossibility, brother and sister, is trying to be forgiven of a sin while persisting in it. If I persist in a sin, I cannot be forgiven of it.

If it is not confessed, it is not repented of, and if it is not forsaken, it is not confessed. And if it is not confessed, it is not forgiven. Those were Finney's words, and I don't go with Finney in all of his theology, but I agree with him in that.

If I haven't quit it, my confession is hypocrisy. For a man to go to God of a morning and say, God, I'm sorry I made a mess of things yesterday and last night, and I want to be forgiven. I'm going out and making a mess of them today, too, but I want to be forgiven for yesterday.

How foolish can we get? All pardon, and the voice of moral reason supports this, that all pardon is conditioned upon an intention to reform. If a man does not intend to reform, then God cannot pardon him. God could not morally, with reason, pardon a man that doesn't intend to reform.

I've heard men stand up and swing their arms and cry, I don't believe in reformation, I believe in regeneration, and I want to answer, I believe in both. I believe that if a man who is crooked in his business dealings, who lies about his income tax, who cuts corners and cheats for in his work, who is crooked with

his wife, who has a dirty tongue, who loves to take his liquor on the sly, and if he can get out of a dead won't pit, a man who lives like that, then you say, well, tell him grace will save him, believe on Christ and all is well. If he intends to reform and quit that kind of dirty business, grace will save him.

But if he intends to go on living like that, grace can't reach him. It is a cheap grace indeed, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was later hanged by Hitler for saying such things. It's cheap grace indeed that makes the grace of God available to every bum and tramp that doesn't intend to reform or intend to get right with God.

Listen, wash you, he says, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. The man on his way to commit a sin passes a church, crosses himself and looks up and trusts that he is forgiven, and goes on to commit his sin. Moral reason says he is to turn his around and go back and say, I'm sorry, God, I'm not going, I'm going to live right.

Jesus, our Lord, told about that by two men. He said there were two boys of the same father, and one of them said to his father, his father said to the two boys, now I'd like to have you work in the vineyard today. One of them said, all right, father, I'll work, but he didn't work.

And the other one said, I won't. The father bowed his head and the sour one went away and left them. When he came back, he found the boy that had said, I'll go, father, never went at all.

He never intended to. When the boy who had sassed his father back and said, I won't, got to thinking it over. And he said, I'm a heel.

My dad's the best friend of God. His calloused hands indicate his love for me. And I was such a stupid fool as to say to my father, I won't.

Oh, I'm sorry. Wait till he comes home, I'll tell him how sorry I am. In the meantime, I'll go to work.

So he hustled out into the field and did himself a nice day's work. Father came back. Which of those two men had repented? Which of those two men had fellowship with his father? The boy who flippantly said, I'll go and didn't go, or the man who said, I won't go and finally did.

The man, not what a man says, but how a man lives, according to this. That's reason, that's reasonable. Olympic Titus and Marcus Aurelius and Seneca and all the rest of them would have to agree to this.

And the Church Fathers and Luther and all the rest would have to agree to this. And they do and did agree with this. It's only a twisted concept of grace that allows me to believe that the grace of God will save me at the same time I don't intend to quit my evil, but I intend to walk on in my evil ways.

Always remember, sir, the voice of moral reason makes all pardon to be conditioned upon an intention to reform. And the Governors of the provinces or the Prime Ministers, Governors in the states with which I was so long familiar, but they can pardon a man. They can go into a prison and shake hands with a man and go out and sign his pardon if he's committed murder.

They can sign his pardon. They have absolute power of pardon. What kind of Governor would he be who went into a prison and allowed himself to become emotionally attached to a young man who had a lifetime for murder? He said to that young man, I'll pardon you, but if I pardon you, what will you do? The young man says, Well, I want to go out and get my gang together and commit more murder.

I want to cut the throat of the judge that sentenced me here. I want to put a bullet through the heart of the prosecuting attorney, and I want to put the feet of every witness that witnessed against me in soft concrete, and let it harden, and then take them out in the boat and dump them over. That's what I'm going to do.

What kind of a Governor would pardon a man like that? Now, of course, that's extreme, naturally. I go to the extreme to get the illustration to make you see. The man who doesn't intend to live right doesn't intend to be pardoned, because he may want to be, but he'll not be.

It says here plainly, Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. But we divorce, we cut that with a butcher knife from the part that's above it, and it bleeds, for just above it, it says, wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless and plead for the widow, and come and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet.

What sins? The sins he mentioned above, the evil of their doings, oppressing and all the rest. He says, Though they have been as scarlet, they shall be white as wool, and though they be red like crimson, they shall be snow. Then adds, If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat of the good of the land.

When the doctrine of obedience went out of the order of the Fundamentalist Church, Fundamentalism began to die, and it's been dying right along, and is dying right along. And there are men who are ashamed anymore to say, I'm a Fundamentalist. Billy Graham says he's an Essentialist.

He doesn't like the word Fundamental, obviously. And others, men of the gospel, and men of belief, and men of Christ, don't like the word Fundamental anymore. Why? Because the Fundamentalists allowed themselves to get trapped into the terrible belief that grace saved men even when those men never intended to reform.

No rock would God nor be right. The blood of Christ never cleansed a man's sin if a man didn't want to be cleansed from it. God never pardoned a sin a man still loved.

If you still love it, God won't pardon it. It must be a getting right, and a cleaning up, and a straightening out. Learn to do well, he said.

Somebody says, that's legalism. All right, call it what you will. Isaiah said it.

Somebody says that Isaiah is in the Old Testament. Yes, but Jesus quoted him, and so did Paul. Paul quoted him right along.

Why can't I? Make you clean. Oh, how we need clean churches. How we need clean churches.

I was writing with a young lady who was kind enough to stop by the house before my wife got her chariot, and we got in the thing and were driving away. A man passed by. He spoke to her.

She said, Do you see that man? She said, I work with him. He said, He's got the dirtiest tongue, so dirty that I have to get up and walk out of the office sometimes because of the filth of his tongue. And yet he is an officer in a nearby church, has a high position in a nearby church, but so dirty that he embarrasses the people that have to work around him.

Now, I'm telling you something. A dirty-tongued church officer is a greater enemy of the gospel of Christ than Hitler or Khrushchev ever were, or could be. A crooked businessman who is on the board of a church, who has a testimony, and who is known to cut corners and deal crookedly, he is a greater enemy of the gospel of Christ than these college professors who laugh at the gospel and teach their students that there's nothing to it.

And the greatest aid to the Church of Christ is not an eloquent preacher. The greatest friend of the Church of Christ is not the learned theologian. They are both needed.

But the greatest friend of the Church of Christ is the man who walks clean and upright, and nobody can stick a sin on him. I used to know a man who carried mail. Carried mail is a holiness, Brother.

He used to get up and testify, and there was no pride in it, no arrogance in it. It was humble testimony. He used to say, I carry mail all day, and it falls into the snow sometimes, and my hands are stiff, and I have to get down and dig letters out of the snow in a zero day, and carry it.

The grace of God has been so good to me, and the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed me so thoroughly that he enables me to live right even under circumstances like that. He said, I just ask and invite any of you that want to follow me around all day and see whether I don't live what I testify to. I tell you, my brother and sister, this kind of thing is what the Church needs.

That man was a greater friend of the Church if he lived that kind of life than any preacher could be, for the best the preacher can do is preach. But the man who lives it, oh, what a sermon he preaches! What a sermon! Now, intention can be proved only by one way, and that's by a changed life. Notice nine active verbs here, and I'm finished.

Nine active verbs. Worship, make, put, cease, learn, seek, relieve, and plead. Nine verbs, and you can't do one of them sitting down.

You have to get up and be morally active. The curse of religion in our day is religion in the passive voice. Always somebody else is doing something for me, and I'm sitting like a small poodle, receiving the ministrations of God and angels while I sit.

No, it won't work. There are these active verbs. You do something as a moral, responsible being, as a being capable of choice.

Clean up your life. Cease to live the way you lived before. Learn holy living and live it by the grace of God.

Seek the poor and try to help them get delivered from oppression and injustice, and live like a man should. But you say, you can't do it by yourself. Nobody ever expected you to.

He says, I'll come into you, I'll fill you with the Holy Ghost, I'll wash you, I'll make you clean, I'll cleanse you from all sin. No, God in me does it, but I've got to be up there working with God. No sin is too vile to be forgiven, thank God.

No sin is too vile to be forgiven. All manner of sins and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto the sons of men. No matter what the man thinks of it, God will forgive it.

No matter what the public thinks of it, God will forgive it. No matter how intense is the scarlet, nor how dark the crimson, God says, I will forgive and make it white as snow and white as wool. And that's just the voice

of reason.

It's all so reasonable. You don't have to apologize for this kind of Christianity. This is the voice of reason, the holy voice of the book.

It's morally sound and right and good, and asks you to take nothing on the credit of Pope or prelate, but believe it and prove it to be true in your own life, and you'll see how wonderful the gospel is and how effective. Father, we pray thy blessing upon the truth. Lord Jesus, we would be clean men and women.

We would put away evil. We would cease to do wrong. We would amend our ways.

But all this we would do knowing that in us there dwells no good thing, knowing that left to ourselves that we could not possibly wash ourselves nor make ourselves right nor live right. We thank thee for the Holy Spirit. We thank thee for the power of the gospel.

We thank thee for the retreat of prayer and the hiding place of devotion. We thank thee, Lord, that it's possible to live as become saints in an evil and adulterous generation. Grant that we may, for Christ's sake.

Amen.

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