

“It Is All About the Heart”

Psalm 51

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Grandpa was going into surgery and his young great-granddaughter wanted to pray for him. She touched the hearts of all who heard her prayer and brought a smile to each stressed-looking face. She prayed, “Dear God, please take care of my ‘ampie. His heart is sick and he needs to have an ice maker put in.”

The heart is an amazing organ. It weighs only about twelve ounces, but think of this, if the heart beats at seventy-two beats per minute, it pumps through itself forty-five pounds of blood per minute. That would be 2,700 pounds per hour and about 32.4 tons per day! Just think, this muscle that never rests except between beats. Further, do you know that every thirty seconds all of the blood in the body passes through the heart. And it has a grip greater than that of one’s fist. The two ventricles of the heart hold an average of ten ounces of blood which is pumped out at each beat. And does about one-fifth of the mechanical work of the body. (Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II Judson Press, 1956, p. 411)

That is rather amazing isn’t it? But we all know that the heart can have problems, as some are painfully aware. The American Heart Association reports that more than 58 million Americans suffer from one or more cardiovascular diseases. Coronary heart disease is the single leading cause of death in the US. Every 29 seconds someone in this country will suffer a coronary event. And every minute someone will die from heart disease.

It has been found that emotions as well as our lifestyle have an effect on our hearts. A study reveals that 80 percent of the employees in America are dissatisfied with their work. After all, why do twenty percent more people have fatal heart attacks on Monday mornings than any other day or time in the week? Which would indicate some truth in the saying, “My job is killing me!” So our emotions, our feelings, really can affect our overall well being, including the state of our heart. AND all of this brings us to our Biblical text for today. The Psalmist writes, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. . .”

Read Psalm 51.

The Psalmist isn’t praying that God will give him a heart transplant. At least, not literally. In the Bible when it speaks of the heart, it is usually not referring to a physical organ that pumps blood around our body. It is speaking of the place in our bodies and our brains where our emotions are located. Those emotions are powerful. Some emotions are even more powerful than our physical bodies and much, much more powerful than our logical minds. After all, how many times do our emotions keep us awake at night, or keep us on edge when our logical minds would tell us its time to sleep or relax?

Father Anthony De Mello once said something very interesting. He said that

people mistakenly assume that their thinking is done by their head. “It is actually done by the heart, which first dictates the conclusion, then commands the head to provide the reasoning that will defend it.” Look at it this way. We think we are reasonable people. We always weight the pros and cons and make a rational decision. Good luck with that. If that were true, none of us would ever snap at one another or demean one another or sabotage important relationships, or do things that we know are self-destructive. Our emotions are very powerful. Otherwise, why do we do so many illogical things?

Would it surprise you that the David who wrote this is the same David who had an affair with Bathsheba and went so far as to kill her husband as a cover-up. The words, *“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight. . .”* Then a few verses later we read his sincere plea: *“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”*

(Let me take a moment here to reinforce the three parts of God’s grace that Pastor Gary talked about last week. Remember, prevenient grace, saving grace, and sanctifying grace. In this scripture David recognizes prevenient grace as he says, “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. . .” Then saving grace comes when he cries, “Create in me a pure heart, O God. . .” And lastly, sanctifying grace is found in his request, “. . . grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. . .”)

Now back to our story. David knew he had done wrong. He knows he has let his heart overrule his brain. He had let his heart overrule his values. He had let his heart damage his relationship with those around him. Even more importantly, he had let his heart damage his relationship with God. Thus his cry for a clean heart.

My friends, do we find ourselves there? Where we need a clean or new heart! Where we recognize our heart is filled with anger, jealousy, resentment, guilt, and all those other negative emotions. Have they taken their toll on us? Have we lost the joy of our salvation. Maybe we have not committed those grievous sins like David, but we know the damage of negative thoughts and negative words and actions of our life. Have we lost the sense of peace within ourselves. Then, perhaps we need to pray with David, “Oh, Lord, give me a clean heart.”

Or maybe you have prayed that prayer before and you find yourself still struggling. Let me say, **sometimes it is not easy to change the heart.**

This was the condition for one of the greatest of saints, St. Paul, who wrote in Romans 7, “So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right

there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Paul is saying the same thing, that he cannot control his heart. He cannot control his emotions. He cannot control his sinful nature. Indeed, to a point they control him. If that was true of Paul, how possible it might be for us. Yet, with God's help Paul was able to overcome by allowing God to change his heart. It was not easy nor done quickly.

Therefore, we need to recognize that no authentic change can take place in a person's heart except by the power of God. I would encourage you if you are struggling with some aspect of your life that is dragging you down, please talk to your doctor. Medicine can help, but generally they treat only the symptoms, not the deep hurt or conflict within. Also, having someone to help you talk out your problems can help, maybe you need to find a counselor, or perhaps a group who can help point you to God. As I personally know of no other way to gain a new heart than by the intervention of a Higher Power. God can help you have a new heart!

William Barclay tells a story of one man who was given a new heart. His name was Tockichi Ishii.

Ishii was a Japanese criminal with an unparalleled record of bestial crime. He had murdered men, women and children. At last he was caught. In prison, he was like a caged tiger. He was visited by two Canadian women who tried to speak to him through the bars; but he simply glowered at them like a wild beast. They left a Bible with him; he began to read and could not stop. He read on and on, coming eventually to the story of the crucifixion. It was the words: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do," which broke him. "I stopped," he said. "I was stabbed to the heart as if pierced with a five-inch nail. Shall I call it the love of Christ? Shall I call it his compassion? I do not know what to call it. I only know that I believed and my hardness of heart was changed."

Later when the jailer came to lead Ishii to the scaffold, he found not the surly brute that he had expected to find, but a radiant man, for, says William Barclay, "Tockichi Ishii, the murderer, had been born again." Caroline Macdonald. Cited in *And He Had Compassion* [Vallehy Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1976] pp 207-208)

We may not be murderers, but we may still be in need of, or crying out for a new heart. We may have our sins, hurts, fears, regrets but when we come to Almighty God seeking a new heart - we have come to the right place - when we ask, "Create in me a new heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. . ." Yes, it is all about the heart! And we shall be made whole!