

FORMING A HEART THAT INVITES GOD'S TOUCH - Putting Warmth Back Into Your Soul - Part one

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Isaiah 66:1-5 - "Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? [2] All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. ***But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.*** [3] "He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations; [4] I also will choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight." [5] Hear the word of the LORD, ***you who tremble at his word***: "Your brothers who hate you and cast you out for my name's sake have said, 'Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy'; but it is they who shall be put to shame.

There will be **two texts** for this entire series of messages. For the first few opportunities we'll be looking at **Isaiah 66:1-5**. After that we'll look at **2 Kings chapter 22**.

The passage in Isaiah is striking. The aim of God's words is twofold:

a) ***To keep them from resting their hearts on the beautiful temple in which they worshipped*** - God says two things to stir their hearts:

i) **"Thus says the LORD: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?'"**(Isaiah 66:1)

"You think your temple is a beautiful place? Let Me tell you about where I live all the time. Heaven is where I live. Your temple is on the earth - well, the whole earth is my ***footstool***" - it's what I use to rest my feet!"

ii) **"All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word"** (Isaiah 66:2).

"I have infinitely great creative powers. I have made everything you can see. I have made the universe and could have made a thousand more if I so desired!"

b) ***God's next goal is to keep them from resting on outward religious performances while continuing to live in wickedness.***

To do this He puts together in a series ***four pairs that really don't seem to belong together at all***: "He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations...."(Isaiah 66:3).

I know of no single verse of Scripture that more fully discloses God's hatred for acts of religion that are performed when the heart is far from God. Everything religious - even acts of devotion ***commanded*** by God - are not only ***neutralized*** but ***corrupted*** by persistent wickedness in other areas. Nothing can change the fact that they have ***"chosen their own ways"*** (3) instead of God's. Nothing else they do can ***compensate*** for habituated known disobedience.

But there is treasure in this text. In the middle of all of these denunciations God gives a brief ***summary of the heart of the one on whom He will look with favour and blessing*** - **Isaiah 66:2** - **".... But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word."**

"The one who trembles at my word" - "I have made everything you see. There is nothing in all of creation that compares in beauty in my eyes than a ***trembling frame before My word***. Your temple of gold and all of the sacrifices you can muster are insignificant compared to a trembling heart"

We should pay close attention to those words. God looks across this congregation and doesn't regard everyone alike - ***"This***

is the one to whom I will look (2). It's an incredibly *non-institutional* thing. It's an *individual* thing. It can't be mass produced. **"Out of the whole crowd, this is the one on whom I set my attention."** When God says He has a *special regard* for a certain type of individual, we should pay close attention.

This is what we want to analyse for a few weeks. If this kind of heart is so prized by our Creator God, what does it look like? What are the marks of a trembling heart before God's Word? How can I know if I have one or am growing into one? It's well worth study and consideration.

1) A TREMBLING HEART SEES THE AUTHORITY OF GOD BEHIND EVERYTHING IN GOD'S WORD

Our hearts can be a mixed bag of undetected motives. Good habits can be diluted of transformational power by thoughtlessness. A person can visit church services like he drives to the office. We can want God more for the sanitizing of our kids than to revive our own hearts. I can read God's Word because, like tracking the number of steps I walk in day, it becomes a "Christian goal" - a duty to be achieved.

My point isn't that these motives are wicked. But, at some point, if God's ever going to inflame my heart down the road, ***I will have to set myself to seek God's Word as life itself for my heart.***

See Moses reminding the people of this - Deuteronomy 32:46-47 - "....he said to them, **'Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. [47] For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.'**"

This is a very carefully worded injunction. Moses isn't just telling these people to *remember* God's words. And he's not even telling them God's Words are very important. That's true, of course, but Moses' words press more to the *motive* - the *why* of devotion to God's words.

We all have a hard time doing the things we know we ought to do. That's why Moses talks to the people about ***"life"*** - ***"....be careful to do all the words of this law. [47] For it is no empty word for you, but your very life...."*** Notice that their willingness to really take these words to heart was directly tied to their perceiving them to be *their life*.

Why does Moses tell them that. Because we all have the lie of the devil sown into the fabric of our beings. The remnants of the Fall train our minds that life is more secure and more fulfilling on *our* terms rather than *God's*. You don't have to be a bad person or an atheist to self-direct your will because that's how *life* will be found. And we all want *life*. Life is why we're here.

What is it that will give you a *good* week this week? How you answer that question will shape your *goals* for this week. A ***trembling heart*** sees God's will as the *source* of a good life.

A trembling heart traces God's Word back to God Himself. The trembling heart sees God in all that God says. It traces God's Word back to God's ***creative power***. It sees God as the creator and giver of *life*.

What does your heart see when you read God's Word? What *kind* of God gives this Biblical text? Here's His calling card:

Romans 4:17 - "....who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."

How shall we identify the God of revealed Scripture? Well, He's the One - the *only* One - who ***"gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."*** A ***trembling heart*** banks everything on this being absolutely true.

Every time God speaks - every time His Word is encountered - and of course, this was what ***Moses*** was telling those religion-worn people - it's *always* about the giving of life. It's always about bringing something new into existence. People who think that way allow God to touch their hearts in love and trust and expectation.

2) **A TREMBLING HEART WILL NEVER FORM A CASE AGAINST PERFORMING GOD'S WORD**

Here you have one of the clearest proofs of a trembling heart. It would rather suffer any other loss than go against the Word of God. All else is secondary.

Revelation 6:9 - "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne."

Here we see trembling hearts in the extreme. They would rather be slain than go against the Word of God. Other men would look at the same word and never see what they saw. They did not have the same heart to stay close to God's Word.

We're at a very dangerous point in today's church. Many fear personal hurt or inconvenience more than they fear God! A good church has become one that suits the wants and heals the hurts of its people.

Maybe you've found your own heart wondering about the ***discipline and devotion of some people in the church***. Perhaps you find it hard to relate to the unattachment of their hearts to material things you find fascinating and satisfying. Maybe they look strange to you - sort of out of touch. If you don't have a heart that trembles at God's Word, you only think them strange or hopelessly irrelevant to today's culture.

But that may not be it at all. It might just be they've found what you're living for too small. Perhaps they've learned to have their affections more shaped by another kingdom all together. Somehow, they may have trained their hearts to be more ***affected*** by God's Word than you have.

3) **A TREMBLING HEART FEARS THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD UPON THOSE WHO DISREGARD HIS WORD**

When's the last time you saw someone being praised by the media for "***trembling at God's Word?***" Our world is not all that concerned that people tremble before God's Word. But there is another audience:

Jeremiah 5:21-25 - "Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not. [22] **Do you not fear me? declares the LORD. Do you not tremble before me?** I placed the sand as the boundary for the sea, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail; though they roar, they cannot pass over it. [23] But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and gone away. [24] **They do not say in their hearts, 'Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest.'** [25] **Your iniquities have turned these away, and your sins have kept good from you.**"

What a last sentence that is - "***...your sins have kept good from you.***" They always do. But that doesn't go deep enough. ***Why*** would anyone do that? What makes people sin and keep ***good*** from their own lives? This is the thrust of the prophet's words. "***What a strange thing it is that men, who are so dependant on my patience and mercy - who couldn't even last without rain - will harden their hearts against My might and authority!***"

The angels are amazed that any person could think that he could rebel against the Word of God and not have God bring him to task for it. Without having ***good*** diminish in his or her life.

There seems to be something in the human heart that is slow to wake up. These people in Jeremiah's day were already suffering from the pain of their disobedience to the voice of God - the fields and crops were drying up before their eyes. Yet they still were banking that they could go their own way and make it.

Let God love you by fearing Him. Awaken your own heart to receive goodness by fearing God. Warm your own love for God by trembling before Him. ***Fearing God*** is the root from which ***loving God*** grows. No one can long love a God who can be safely ignored.

4) **THE ONE WHO TREMBLES AT GOD'S WORD KNOWS IT REACHES TO THE VERY DEPTHS AND CORE OF HIS BEING**

God sees what no one else does. That's really the whole issue in the ***Isaiah 66*** passage. The people had come to

think a surface cleansing would be enough for the maintenance of their walk with God. They performed the prescribed ceremonies in the temple. And those sacrificed were all pictures and reminders of God's atonement and forgiveness. That's what these people thought of when they pictured their God.

Forgiveness. This can easily become the only tool in the box for many professing Christians. It's free. It erases sin. And apparently, so I'm told, it's endless. Therefore the logic is simple. What more could I need?

And the prophet Isaiah has a rather potent message to these sin-sacrificed people. God's grace, when received, doesn't just erase *sin*. It alters the ***tastes of the heart***. It doesn't just change my ***record***. It changes my ***attitude***.

This is what the writer of Hebrews was developing: **Hebrews 4:12** - "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the ***thoughts and intentions of the heart***."

Here is the healthy heart response to God's Word. The humble person trembles before the Word because he knows first hand the ***depth of its reach***. It touches parts of the life I would rather leave undealt with. And it touches those parts of my soul with ***transforming grace*** - not just ***legal forgiveness***.

When the heart approaches the Word of God with sincerity it doesn't just change the way that person perceives ***past sin*** - the removal of ***guilt***. It also changes the way that person views ***future sin***, producing an intense ***intolerance*** of anything that might grieve the heart of God.

5) **THE ONE WHO TREMBLES AT THE WORD, IS MOVED BY GOD'S UNBELIEVABLE GRACE AND PROMISE THAT HE SEES THERE**

This may be surprising to some people. The Bible teaches that it's not only the ***fear of the Lord*** that should make us tremble. The ***goodness of the Lord*** should too:

Psalm 2:11 - "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling."

The Bible says the goodness of the Lord leads to repentance. Calloused people receive the blessings of the Lord and ***see the ultimate end simply in enjoying them***. People with tender hearts receive God's blessings with the goal of ***glorifying the God who gave them***.

We've already considered one example of this in this message. God expected His own people to use rain for more than getting wet and making money on crops - **Jeremiah 5:24** - "They do not say in their hearts, 'Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest.'"

God expected these people to ***learn about Him*** by pondering His faithfulness. They weren't to become mere ***consumers*** of life. They were to ***learn about God*** - His faithfulness, kindness, and their dependency on Him for all things. They would learn to honor the God who provided them with all earthly blessings. They were to give this God ***their hearts***.

Now, God sends His rain on the just and the unjust. But the unjust don't think about all of those things. God's goodness bounces off them like water (sorry)!

Not so the righteous. Their ***hearts*** are softened more than the soil by God's rain. They tremble in amazement before Him. Nothing is ever wasted in a life like that.

We've just started into this. More in the next three weeks.