

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

Part three - Teaching #1823 - Sunday, July 26th, 6 p.m.

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Isaiah 66:2 - "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."

This has been the central text for this series of messages. There's a *frame of mind* - a *kind of heart* - that God is particularly likely to smile upon, regard, make fruitful, and bless. The text says He *gives this kind of person His special attention and notice*.

Surprisingly, it's not a *perfect* person. We all sin. But God has particular affinity with a *repentant* person - a *contrite* person - one who fears grieving God more than he or she fears anything else in life.

In the last message we looked at two passages that describe some traits of heart that are *similar* to this kind of heart, but not the *same*. We looked at **Acts 24:24-25** (describing *Felix* who "trembled" at the words of Paul) and **James 2:19** (which describes the *demons* who hold accurate beliefs about God and "*tremble*"). Neither of these passages deals with the kind of heart God values or esteems.

Tonight we will look at some genuine examples of a *"trembling heart"* that brings such delight to Father God:

2 Kings 22:19 - "...because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the LORD."

I wish we had more time tonight. The whole story in **2 Kings 22** is quite a fascinating one:

- * Eight year old *Josiah* comes to the throne of Judah at a time of deep spiritual decline. His father (*Amon*) did nothing but evil in the eyes of the Lord all his life.
- * The temple had fallen into total disuse in terms of the true worship of the Lord.
- * Josiah is in the middle of *refurbishing the temple* - **22:4-6** - "Go up to *Hilkiah* the high priest, that he may count the money that has been brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the threshold have collected from the people. [5] And let it be given into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the LORD, and let them give it to the workmen who are at the house of the LORD, repairing the house [6] (that is, to the carpenters, and to the builders, and to the masons), and let them use it for buying timber and quarried stone to repair the house."

Quite a bit of money is needed just to get it functional again.

- * As they are cleaning through all the dust and rubble, *Hilkiah, the high priest, finds a copy of the Book of the Law of God* **22:8** - "And *Hilkiah* the high priest said to *Shaphan* the secretary, 'I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.' And *Hilkiah* gave the book to *Shaphan*, and he read it."

This is amazing. Apparently, nobody had even noticed that it had been missing. Nobody particularly cared. Out of sight. Out of routine. Out of mind. It is ever so.

Mind you, they were still going to the temple. They still kept the motions of their religious routine. But God's Word had long been ignored and left out. There was no *authoritative base* around which they submitted their own wills and ambitions and desires.

- * **Shaphan the official secretary** brought the book to the young King Josiah and began to read it to him (9-10). Perhaps, for the very first time in his life, Josiah actually hears the law of God read out loud - **2 Kings 22:9-10** - **“And Shaphan the secretary came to the king, and reported to the king, “Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house and have delivered it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the LORD.” [10] Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read it before the king.”**
- * **verse 13** records Josiah's response - **“Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.”**
- * Then Josiah sends for **Huldah the prophetess** to find out what God has to say about Judah's neglect of God's ways for all of these years - **2 Kings 22:14** - **“So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter), and they talked with her.”**
- * **Huldah's response is found in verses 15-20** - In a nutshell, for the people there will be great judgement from the hand of God. But because **Josiah's heart was tender and responsive to the word of God**, he would be spared seeing all of this coming disaster and would die in peace.

The point of this whole chapter is quite direct. Out of all of the stubbornness and rebellion and corruption among the people of Judah, we see one person standing out in God's eyes. Just as Isaiah had recorded - **“This is the one to whom I will look....”** There was one person singled out for special blessing and attention and it all had to do with that person's tender heart to the Word of God. In the midst of total corruption, Josiah had a trembling heart.

Consider two people back to back for a moment:

* **Pharaoh** - God wanted to get a message across to Pharaoh. The story is told in **Exodus chapters 7-12**. After ten plagues, he is ten times more hardened against the will of God than we was at first.

How could anyone ignore the kind of messages Pharaoh received? There was no doubt as to what God wanted. God's power was clearly manifested.

* **Josiah** - Josiah never saw any kind of miracle at all. He never saw an angel. All that happens is **someone reads a passage from the Scriptures to him**. But Josiah can't stand the sense of divine presence as he listens. He drops to his knees. He tears his clothes. He cries his eyes out.

Remember, all of this he does, responding to **no more than any one of us hears on any given Sunday**. The difference isn't in the manifestation of divine presence. We all like to think we'd be responsive to God were He to speak in an audible voice or visit us with an angel or do something **obvious** and **dramatic**. But that's just a hoax.

Josiah hears the Bible read out loud - just like we all read together on Sunday morning. Imagine people just dropping to their knees, weeping in contrition and repentance. You see, the difference is in the heart **responding** to divine presence.

So how do we get there? Is there any process of heart restoration?

1) **EXPOSE YOUR HEART TO THE MEANS THROUGH WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL WORK.**

Only the Spirit can take away the heart of stone. Only He can keep the heart flesh-like. The Old Testament prophets looked forward to the day when the Spirit of God would do this in His people. The world can only soften your *emotions*. But that's not the same thing as softening the heart *toward God*.

We need to keep this distinction clear in our minds. Any person is capable of being *moved*. The right book, song (even in church), or the sad story or movie can stir something in Christian and atheist alike. Those are only temporary emotional reactions.

But a soft heart to the things of God can only come through being in God's House, prayer in the secret place, much exposure to God's Word, waiting on God with your conscience aligned and tender to the slightest divine nudge.

See the lesson here. I don't do all of those things because I feel inclined to do them. I do them so I *will* feel inclined to do them. That's God's means for softening and ploughing up my heart. That's how He replaces old affections with new ones.

2) **TAKE MORE SERIOUSLY THE WARNINGS AND JUDGEMENTS OF GOD'S WORD**

Centuries ago, Puritan **Richard Sibbes** wrote these words - "*Faith constantly sets the day of judgement before the believer's eyes. This causes him to live in the fear of the Lord.*"

Your New Testament repeatedly reinforces that statement:

2 Timothy 4:1 - "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom...." This is how Paul leads into his instruction - to *pastors*.

2 Corinthians 5:11 - "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.

Here Paul describes his motivation in evangelism. This is what leads him to *"persuade others."* He doesn't just think vaguely about the *"fear of the Lord."* He says he *"knows"* the fear of the Lord. He's intimate with it.

2 Peter 3:11-12 - "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, [12] waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!"

Here we have another apostle - Peter. And he writes about his motivation toward *"holiness and godliness"* (11). He makes it sound like holiness is impossible without regular, deep consideration of the coming of the Lord and the end of this age.

3) **TAKE HEED AGAINST SINNING AGAINST CONSCIENCE.**

All sin is serious. But sins against conscience do more than just stain the record before God. Sins against conscience darken the understanding and deaden true godly affections.

A small sin committed *against conscience* is far more damaging than a *grosser sin committed in ignorance*. A sin against conscience numbs a trembling heart before the Lord. That's why Paul especially makes one of his main spiritual goals *not to foul up the work of conscience in his actions*:

Acts 24:16 - "So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man."

When Paul says he "*takes pains*" to have a clear conscience he means he is willing to make any sacrifice and deny any desire and forsake any earthly friendship to do what God calls him to do. And make no mistake. It is *frequently* costly to do what's right before God. Make up your mind it's worth any earthly price to please God.

1 Timothy 1:5 - "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

Here we see faith isn't the product of adherence to proper creed, as important as sound doctrine is. Faith with substance is the result of paying the high cost of keep the conscience clean before God.

1 Timothy 3:9 - "They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience."

There are deep and precious truths in the Christian's mind to cherish. But only a "*clear conscience*" will breathe life into the truths we profess. Otherwise we will end up wondering where is the point in our beliefs.

1 Peter 3:16 - "...having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame."

Here we see the power of personal integrity in the witness of the church. People need to see the difference Christ makes in the areas most prone to compromise in the pervading culture.

So faith, holiness and the leading of the Holy Spirit are all dependant on the conscience being clear of any offence. A clean conscience keeps the heart soft before God. That's the goal we're studying in this series. Nothing else can be properly maintained when the voice of conscience speaks against the heart.

I want to pursue this a little further. What happens when a Christian sins against conscience? Why is the conscience so important to maintaining a "*trembling heart*" toward God?

Let's look at **two passages of Scripture**:

* **1 Timothy 4:2 - "...through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared...."**

That word for "*seared*" is "*kauteriazō*." It's where we get our word "*cauterize*." Think about that. It's the process where the *nerve endings have been desensitized*.

Paul says it's not that these men don't know that what they are doing is wrong. They just don't care anymore. And they *can't be made to care*.

* **Ephesians 4:18-19 - "They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. [19] They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity."**

Two phrases - "*have become callous*" and "*greedy to practice every kind of impurity*." They can't be made to feel sensitive to God anymore. Because of that, they will only move deeper into sin and baseness. No hope is offered for a turn-around in heart.

There's another step in the process of forming a heart God longs to touch:

4) **KEEP YOUR HEART TENDER BY AVOIDING SEXUAL SIN.**

I don't think you could prove from Scripture that some sins are more **damming** than others. Which sins aren't worthy of God's judgement? But I think you can prove that certain sins are more **damaging** than others.

Look at the life of **David**. He sinned in numbering the people. That's where he repented and asked for judgement from God rather than men. He comes so quickly to beg for God's mercy.

In fact, **that's what marked David as a man after God's own heart**. He was always so quick to **feel the pain of his sin. He couldn't bear the weight of it in his own heart**.

But when he sins with Bathsheba it's a different story. **That came very close to being the end for David**. He felt guilty about what he'd done. **But he never did come clean before God on his own**. **Nathan** had to expose, uncover and reprimand David before he turned to the Lord. What if Nathan hadn't come?

There's a particular **power** and a particular **shame** in sexual sin. And both factors matter. There is **power to pull a person into darkness - to lead him or her into further paths of deception and quilt**. And the other reason plays into this power. Sexual sins, perhaps more than any other, carry along with them a **shame** that keep a person from walking in the light. They are usually the most **secret** sins. And because of that they tend to metastasize internally.

5) TO KEEP YOUR HEART TENDER, KEEP YOURSELF IN FELLOWSHIP WITH THE BODY OF CHRIST.

Hebrews 3:13 - "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

This verse contains such an important, yet lost concept. Just how do I keep my heart tender before the Lord? How can I avoid being "**hardened by the deceitfulness of sin**."

We should all make this mental note. The writer says I can't keep a tender heart before God alone. I am designed to need **community**. And the less I feel that need the more I am already deceived by sinful thinking about the gathered church and the vitally spiritual need for fellowship.

When you think about it, the reason I need your help is obvious. According to the writer of Hebrews sin makes its inroads into my life through **deceitfulness**. And the thing about deceitfulness is the more you **are** the more you **don't know or feel you are**.

Many believers today think they can trust themselves to stay holy. They start to treat their relationship with Christ as their business alone. So what if I don't get out to church as often as I once did? I read my Bible more. I still pray. I memorize Bible verses. And all of those things are great as long as they're not being used as a back-up to disobedience to God in some other areas. You can't build up spiritual credit that way.

Paul says, to avoid the encroachment of sin's deceitfulness in your own heart, you need the input of someone else in the Body on a regular basis. In fact, he says it will be needed "**daily**."

The conclusion of the matter is there is only one job in the Christian life. You don't have to do fifty things. You have to do **one** thing. You have to keep your heart tender and trembling before the slightest divine impulse. Everything else hinges on this single endeavor.

Sometimes it's easy to miss something most essential. It's a bit like the lady who bought a \$10,000 exotic talking bird. But the bird didn't seem happy. She was worried so she bought the bird a fabulous little swing for his cage. But the bird got worse. She bought him a mirror. No change. She brought in an orchestra to play the bird music

but it didn't help.

One sad day the bird died. Broken-hearted, the lady wrapped the lifeless form up and took it back to the store. ***"Didn't the bird say anything before he passed on?"*** "Well yes, but I think it was too late." ***"What did he say?"*** "He said, ***Don't they sell any birdseed in that store!?"***

What I'm saying tonight has been said for centuries. Saints through the ages have found these Scriptural principles effective for maintaining a pure heart. They must be a part of every thoughtful Christian's life:

- * Regularly expose your soul to the things of the Spirit
- * Take to heart more seriously the warnings and judgements of God
- * Avoid any sin against the clear light of conscience
- * Avoid sexual sin
- * Stay in regular fellowship with the Body of Christ