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“THE HEART OF GOD”

Matthew 11:29

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart.”

A favorite devotional song is: "Near to the Heart of God" and one verse is as follows:

*"There is a place of quiet rest,
Near to the heart of God,
A place where sin cannot molest,
Near to the heart of God."*

No study of the Person of God would be complete without a survey of scriptural references to the heart of God. Of the hundreds of times the word "heart" is used in Scripture, very few times does it refer to the blood-pumping organ in our body. The phrases "the heart of man" or "the heart of God" are terms used to refer to the center of one's being. The heart has been called "the citadel of the affections" and "the inner-sanctum of consciousness"; it is that which is innermost, hidden, the very center of things, "the inward man," (Eph. 3:16,17)

God is spirit. Spirit beings do not have flesh and blood and consequently do not have a blood pumping organ called "the heart." Yet because physical life flows out of the organ called "the heart," God has applied this term to spiritual beings, including Himself, in order to convey certain truths relating to the centrality of His existence.

We have heard it said, "If you really want to know a person, get to know their heart." That is, get to know them in the inner sanctum of their being. The Hebrew word for "heart" is "leb" pronounced "labe" and means, "The center of anything; the most interior organ; the centermost of the being or intellect."

All human knowledge of God depends upon the gracious condescension of God to reveal himself in ways and words that man can understand. Apart from his condescension, God would remain unknown and unknowable. He condescends to use human physical characteristics to express and explain his nature. The Bible uses anthropomorphic expressions, but it recognizes their limitation because of God's transcendence.

J. I. Packer, in his book knowing God, wrote: "when faced with god's anthropomorphisms, however, it is easy to get hold of the wrong end of the stick. We have to remember that man is not the measure of his maker and that when the language of human personal life is used of God, none of the limitations of human creature hood are thereby being implied - limited knowledge, or power, or foresight, or strength, or consistency, or anything of that kind."

"So long as man remembers that he is the copy and God the original, not vise versa, there is every reason why anthropomorphism should contribute not to ignorance or error but to a true

knowledge of God. Anthropomorphism is justified in relation to God because God himself uses it, and God himself uses it because its real basis is the divinely created theomorphism of man." (G.W. Bromiley, the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 1979, Vol.1, p.138)

Paramount on the list of many Scriptures that give a clear view of the heart of God, not surprisingly, is John 3:16 - *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

However, no mention is made of God's heart in that verse. But there are about one dozen verses, that do speak of God's heart and from these we can learn much about God. Let us look at some of these verses and see if we can catch something of God's great heart beat that will aid us in understanding Him and make us more like Him.

If we are to know God intimately we must know His heart. What do we know about the great heart of God? As we look at the heart of God as revealed in the Scriptures, we learn that:

GOD'S HEART REVEALS THE PAIN CAUSED BY SIN

Genesis 6:6 says, *"And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart."* (nkjv)

The NIV translates the verse as: *"The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain."*

This is the first time the heart of God is mentioned in the Bible. The Hebrew word translated "grieved" is "atsab" and is elsewhere translated "pain", "hurt" or "grief." What pains God's heart? He pained by:

The wickedness of mankind.

"Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD." (Genesis 6:5-8)

The pain and grief, as a result of His human creation's wickedness, led to the catastrophic flood judgment of the world of Noah's day

The waywardness of God's chosen people.

"My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, none at all exalt Him. "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred." (Hosea 11:7-8)

The Hebrew word “*hâphak*” means “*to overturn or tumble*” and is translated “*churns*” (nkjv) or “*turned over*” (nasb). The waywardness of God’s chosen ones causes His heart to be moved. Man’s sin is God’s sorrow! “God is hurt no less by the atrocious sins of men than if they pierced His heart with mortal anguish” (Calvin).

We have heard it said that “We always hurt the one we love.” It is true that we have hurt the heart of God by our wickedness and waywardness. Let us confess our sin and begin immediately to love the One who loves us with all of our hearts!

GOD'S HEART CONCEALS HIS ETERNAL PURPOSES

Jeremiah 30:24 – “*The fierce anger of the LORD will not return until He has done it, and until He has performed the intents of His heart. In the latter days you will consider it.*”

Deut. 29:29 puts this entire subject in focus: “*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*”

God's heart contains his plans for all eternity. The entire history of the universe is the uninterrupted carrying out of a divine plan. We know the thoughts of His heart only as He chooses to reveal them to us. The Scriptures speak to this truth just enough to let us know that God is in control and that we need to trust Him to carry out His plans and purposes for us.

What are some of God’s plans in His heart? He has revealed some of them:

God has plans for all nations.

Psalms 33:10,11 – “*The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations.*”

God has plans for the ending of time.

Jeremiah 23:20 – “*The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly.*”

God has plans for the defeat of His enemies.

Isaiah 63:4 - “*For the day of vengeance is in my heart.....*”

God had plans for the return of His Son.

Matthew 25:13 - “*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.*” AND, Matthew 24:36 – “*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.*”

Locked up in God's great heart are His plans and purposes for the ages. Some of these plans He has fully revealed, some He has not. We only know what is contained in the Divine Revelation, His Word, as concerns all His designs. What He does reveal is overwhelming! We know only a fraction of what He has in mind for the ages to come.

For example, when we read the descriptions of heaven in Revelation chapters 21 and 22, we are left with myriads of questions. What we know now about our eternal home is only a small amount compared to what we shall know and experience when we get there. *“Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”*

(I Cor. 13:12)

Written around the dial of a clock in a church in Strasburg, Germany are these words: "One of these hours the Lord is coming." In view of the fact that Jesus is coming, it is good to know:

"There is a place of comfort sweet,
Near to the heart of God;
A place where we our Savior meet,
Near to the heart of God."

GOD'S HEART CONFIRMS HIS PROMISES

Genesis 8:21, 22 – *“Then the LORD said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease.”*

“The Lord said in his heart.” This is an expression revealing the inward resolve of God’s will and promises extending into the infinite future.

2 Pet 1:4 – *“He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”*

II Corinthians 1:20 says, *“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ.”*

A promise is of no more value than is the ability of the one who makes it to carry through. God’s promises are the Word of the *“God who cannot lie.”* (Titus 1:2)

GOD'S HEART IS WITH HIS PEOPLE IN WORSHIP

I Kings 9:3 – *“And the LORD said to him: “I have heard your prayer and your supplication that you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.”*

The context of the verse shows that the reference relates to Israel and to Solomon and the newly built Temple. However, to conclude that God would only be present in Solomon’s Temple when the people met for worship would be erroneous.

God’s heart is with His people whenever and wherever they are met to worship Him. Jesus said, *“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of*

them." (Matthew 18:20)

Jesus had a conversation about worship with the water-carrying woman of Samaria at Jacob's well. She said, "*Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.*" (John 4:20)

Jesus' reply is interesting: "*Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.*" (John 4:21-22)

In the next statement that Jesus made is where we come in: "*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*" (John 4:23-24)

"*Spirit*" refers not to the Holy Spirit but to the spirit of the worshiper. God is concerned with attitude before act. '*In truth*' means to be concerned for honesty before God and people. It also suggests that believers be biblical in their worship."

Jesus said that God is seeking worshippers. If He is seeking worshippers, He must, therefore, be available to be His worshippers. Worship brings us into the presence of God in a special sense and wherever He is, there is His heart! When we meet to worship, are we conscious of the loving heart of God present to receive worship offered Him "*in spirit and truth*"?

Our worship may sometimes be lifeless ritual and terribly habitual. It would be more vibrant and varied if we "*Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise*" (Psalm 100:4) we focused upon the One Whom we are worshipping and not upon other worshippers! God's great heart is present and our hearts commune with His heart when we worship.

GOD'S HEART IS THE MODEL FOR OUR HEARTS

Jesus has invited us to: "*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart.*" (Matt. 11:29)

David is a good example of what God is looking for in His children. David's predecessor, Saul, was not an obedient king and God removed him. God said to him, "*But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.*" (1 Samuel 13:14)

In his sermon in Antioch, the Apostle Paul rehearsed some of the history of Israel. He referred to God's removal of Saul as king and the selection of David as follows: "*And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.'*" (Acts 13:22)

Notice the phrase, *"Who will do all my will."*

"Saul had not done it. He had disobeyed God in a case where he had received an express command. The characteristic of David would be that he would obey the commands of God. That David did this - that he maintained the worship of God, opposed idolatry, and sought to promote universal obedience to God among the people is expressly recorded of him A man who would not be rebellious and disobedient as Saul was, but would do the will of God and keep his commandments. This refers, doubtless, rather to the public than to the private character of David; to his character as a king. It means that he would make the will of God the great rule and law of his reign, in contradistinction from Saul, who, as a king, had disobeyed God." (Albert Barnes)

I Kings 15:5 records this testimony concerning David: *"David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."*

"When it is said that David was a man after God's own heart, it should be understood, not of his private, but of his public, character. He was a man after God's own heart, because he ruled the people according to the Divine will. He did not allow idolatry; he did not set up for absolute power. He was guided in the government of the nation by the law of Moses, as the standing rule of government, and by the prophet, or the Divine oracle, whereby God gave directions upon particular emergencies. Whatever Saul's private character was, he was not a good king in Israel. He did not follow the law, the oracle, and the prophet; but attempted to be absolute, and thereby to subvert the constitution of the kingdom. That this was the meaning of David's being a man after God's own heart." (Benson)

Conclusion

Now that we know something of the heart of God, we should be ready to say with David, *"Search me, Oh God, and know my heart."* (Psalm 139:23)

There is a question that each of us must answer and the question is capsulated in a song as follows:

"Is your heart right with God?
Washed in the crimson flood,
Cleansed and made holy,
Humble and lowly,
Right in the sight of God?"

If your heart is not right in the sight of God, I remind you that:

"There is a place of full release,
Near to the heart of God:
A place where all this joy and peace,
Near to the heart of God."

Illustration

The body of missionary David Livingstone is buried in Westminster Abbey in London, England. I have stood at his burial spot and rehearsed in my mind some of the stories I remember from my youth about the exploits of this illustrious missionary. However, the body that is buried in Westminster Abbey is not a complete body. Before his death he requested that his heart be buried in Africa, the land that he loved. So, loving Africans, whom he had led to Jesus Christ as their Savior, cut out his heart and buried it at the foot of a tall tree in a small African village. His name and the date of his death were cut upon the bark of the tree and a burial service was conducted by an African name Jacob Wainwright.

The best illustration of the heart of God is also at a tree – the tree on Calvary where God's Son was nailed for our sins. But unlike David Livingstone, Jesus arose and is now at the throne of God interceding for us!