

12/09/21

The Heart of God: A New Sermon Series by Ben S.

God's Welcoming heart:

Matthew 11: 3:28-30

This series has been inspired by the book *Gentle and Lowly* by Dane Ortlund. The aim of this book is to try to describe the heart of God towards his people. It's easier to describe a person's physical attributes but to describe their heart is very difficult. This series is about opening our hearts and getting to know God better. The Bible talks a lot about the heart. In our western culture we usually think the heart is about romance, cupid, love, emotions and feelings. In the Bible the word heart refers to these things but it also refers to our minds, (Matt 8:2) our longings, desires and fears. These are the things that determine our choices. Actions flow out of our heart. (Mark 7:18-21) The heart is the governing centre of everything we do. It is "the well-spring of our lives." (Proverbs 4:23) It is the core of our being and of God's.

If we want to know the heart of God we have to start with Matt 11:28-30 because we must start with Jesus who is "the image of the invisible God". Jesus said, "If you have seen me you have seen the Father." (John 14:9) And, the only place in the whole of scripture where God's heart is directly described is Matt 11:28. Jesus describes the very core of his being as gentle and humble. God's heart is gentle and humble towards those who come to him. Jesus is gentle to those who come to him. "Jesus is not trigger-happy, not harsh, reactionary, easily exasperated. He is the most understanding person in the universe. "The posture most natural to him is not a pointed finger but open arms." (Dane Ortlund) Jesus reveals the welcoming heart of God to us. Anyone who comes to him to be loved, forgiven, received will never be turned away. His welcoming embrace is always gentle.

Jesus uses the word humble or lowly. That word overlaps with gentle but adds the nuance of those who are of low position as in Mary's song. "My soul magnifies the Lord, ...for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant." (Luke 1:46-55) Jesus associates himself with the lowly, leaving his throne in heaven, born to working-class parents, laid in a manger. The outcast of society would flock to him. He died on a cross of shame with nothing. This is our God. He never changes. His heart is so gentle he won't break a bruised reed. God never regrets his promise to receive us. He holds us with joy and satisfaction. He feels his people's pain and weeps with us. He draws near to us in solidarity. This is our God. There is no one like him. Glorious in holiness and power yet gentle and humble in heart towards those who come to him with empty hands.

God desires to give our weary and burdened hearts rest. "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Jesus is not talking about a comfortable life. He calls us to die to selfishness by the way of the cross. He offers spiritual rest for the soul, a deep peace with God so that you can say during the most anxious times of life, "I am actually going to be okay because of Jesus, because my hope is in him." The only way to be right with God is not by keeping his laws and performing well enough to be accepted into his kingdom. The people were yoked to this terrible burden because of the hateful teaching of the Pharisees. Everyone everywhere is trying to attain certain standards, wrestling with this feeling of not being good enough. The thing that you live for is the thing that you yoke yourself to. We live for popularity, pleasure, looks, success, money, beauty, morality, our children. These are all good gifts but if we yoke ourselves to them we end up measuring our worth by these things. It is

exhausting to live like that: weary, burdened, stressed, burnt out and in a very dark place. But the heart of God is to remove that burden from you. Jesus invites us to unyoke ourselves from the burdens of this world and yoke ourselves to him. His yoke is kind. Jesus took the burden of sin and guilt away from us at Calvary forever so we can have his peace forever. Let's come to him and be continually yoked to him. When we do that daily it is so spiritually refreshing. "Weary working burdened one,/ Wherefore toil you so?/ Cease your doing; all was done,/ Long long ago/ Till to Jesus' work you cling/ Cast your deadly doing down,/ Down at Jesus' feet/ Stand in Him and Him alone, Gloriously complete!"

The welcoming heart of God shapes us. "Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them." (Matt 23:1-4) In a pharisaical church the to-do-list is far more important than loving relationships. People put each other on guilt-trips so they will do more. People are doing a lot but there is so much exhaustion, pride and resentment. No one confesses their sin to anyone else, nobody opens up their hearts about the struggles they are going through. Every week in a pharisaical church the people leave burdened. But when we truly understand the welcoming heart of the Lord Jesus and his grace towards sinners like us the church becomes a burden-releasing experience, a hospital for sick people. a place where we find grace. When life goes wrong we think 'I actually need to get to church. I need help and support from my brother's and sister's love. I need the love of Jesus.' Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you. If we know only that Christ has cancelled our debt then we just tolerate each other. Jesus has done something even more wonderful. Jesus has warmly and passionately and actively welcomed us to himself and into his kingdom with great joy. He has actively opened his heart to us. He has called us his friends. When we understand that he has redefined us our church culture will be affected. We are called to welcome one another in the same way no matter how different they are from us, no matter how annoying or offensive they are to us. We are so glad to see everyone. It is a safe place to share our struggles and carry each other's burdens. It is where we come to Jesus together for help and grace. It's a place on a Sunday morning where we can rest and take a breath rejoicing in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do we burden people or do we point them to Jesus? Do we see them through the eyes of the lord Jesus Christ? Do you have a welcoming heart? Take a few moments to pray and respond to God's word and whatever is burdening your heart right now; lift your heart to Jesus Christ knowing that he hears you and receives you and welcomes you with an open heart.

Chorus:
Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.

Elvina M. Hall