

“Ransomed and Restored”

“Create in me a clean heart, O God.” Psalm 51:10

“I will give you a new heart.” Ezekiel 36:26

Now, Beauty feared that she had caused his death. She ran throughout the palace, sobbing loudly. After searching everywhere, she recalled her dream and ran into the garden toward the canal, where she had seen him in her sleep. There she found the poor Beast stretched out unconscious. She thought he was dead. Without concern for his horrifying looks, she threw herself on his body and felt his heart beating. So she fetched some water from the canal and threw it on his face.

Beast opened his eyes and said, “You forgot your promise, Beauty. The grief I felt upon having lost you made me decide to fast to death. But I shall die content since I have the pleasure of seeing you one more time.”

“No, my dear Beast, you shall not die,” said Beauty. “You will live to become my husband. I give you my hand, and I swear that I belong only to you from this moment on. Alas! I thought that I only felt friendship for you, but the torment I am feeling makes me realize that I cannot live without you.”

Beauty had scarcely uttered these words when the castle radiated with light. Fireworks and music announced a feast. These attractions did not hold her attention, though. She returned her gaze to her dear Beast, whose dangerous condition made her tremble. How great was her surprise when she discovered that the Beast had disappeared, and at her feet was a prince more handsome than Eros himself, who thanked her for putting an end to his enchantment. *Beauty and the Beast* by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont.

The Transformation...a creature no one desired to look at transformed into a handsome prince...the dark and ugly now glorious and good. That seems to be the most beautiful outcome of any story written. Why? Perhaps it's the deepest yearning of the human heart. Look how often this theme surfaces.

The phoenix rises from the ashes. Cinderella becomes queen. The ugly duckling becomes what?...a beautiful swan. Pinocchio becomes a real boy. Wretched old Scrooge becomes, as the tale says: “as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man as the good old city knew...” Lions get courage, scarecrows get brains, and a Tin Woodman gets a heart.

May I tell you something? I believe that the reason we love these stories so much is that transformation is the secret to Christianity. Jesus told Nicodemus this: “[You must be born again.](#)” [John 6:37](#) What is that if it is not a transformation? Keeping the Law, following the rules, polishing up your religious manners – none of that will work because we are sinful by nature. What will work is God changing us in Christ. What matters is that we have become different by God's grace. Is that not an important part of the Gospel message? Zacchaeus, the tax trickster becomes Zacchaeus the Honest Man. A prostitute by the name of Mary becomes the last of the truly faithful, when everyone else runs away. Paul, the self-righteous murderer becomes Paul, the humble Apostle.

And what about you and me? How many of you would go so far as to say you have been “transformed”? Or is it more likely you might say: “Well, our names are written down somewhere in heaven and all...we’ve probably changed a little in how we think and act. We confess our creeds now and have gotten our temper under control...well, kind of under control. But transformed? Nah...how about forgiven and on our way?” That’s how most Christians would describe themselves. And it’s partly true, and partly untrue. But it’s the untrue part that’s killing us. We have been told that even though we have been saved by grace, even though God has created a new heart in us, even though we have placed all our hopes in a Savior who loves us...we have been told that our hearts are desperately wicked still. Question: is that what the Bible teaches?

Now, most of the misery we suffer on this planet is the fruit of the human heart gone bad. And Scripture could not be more clear on this. God created us in His image to reflect His glory. And barely 3 chapters into the saga we torpedoed the whole project. Read the first 3 chapters of Genesis sometime. By the 6th chapter of Genesis we read this: “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.” Genesis 6:5-6 This is, by the way, the first mention of God’s heart in the Bible...and his heart is broken because ours is fallen.

And we are fallen. Anybody who is honest knows this. We know we are not what we are meant to be. If we just stop shifting the blame for a moment...stop trying to put the responsibility on someone else...if we take a frank assessment of ourselves and compare it with what God calls us to be...well, most of us will squirm a little and admit we fall short. But if we are truly honest...we’ll have to confess that we are the Beast, Scrooge, the wicked stepsister. Most of the religions in the world concur on some level with this point.

But that’s where Christianity is different. Most of the remedies in religion involve some sort of shaping up on our own, some sort of face-lift where we clean up our act and start behaving as we should. Jews try to keep the Law. Buddhists follow the eight-fold path. Muslims live by the five pillars. Many Christians try church attendance and moral living. Now, if that could work, you would think by now humanity would be on top of things. Are we? I don’t think so. So, what’s wrong?

We have misdiagnosed the disease. The problem is not in our behavior...if it were, we would simply change our behavior. The problem is in us. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned...and that changed things for us all. After all, we have a saying: “Apples don’t fall far.....*What?* And when we do our family tree, whose names are first on the list?...Adam and Eve. No wonder Jesus would say: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, and slander.” Matthew 15:19. We don’t need an upgrade in behavior choices...we need a transformation, we need a miracle!

And we get the ultimate miracle! A man comes down from heaven and slips into our story...as Neo does in the *Matrix*, as Maximus does in *Gladiator*, as Wallace does in *Braveheart*. Yet he is no ordinary man...and his mission is no ordinary mission. He comes as a substitute...and he comes to destroy one system and be the firstborn of something new.

And Jesus so changed things that Paul would write: “For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.” Romans 5:17 Jesus said of himself, that the Son of God came, “...to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:28.

CROSS...and you have been ransomed by Christ. Your treachery is forgiven. You are entirely pardoned for every wrong thought and desire and action, by grace, for the sake of Jesus who died for you. This is what the vast majority of Christians understand as the central work of Christ for us. It is a deep and stunning truth. And it brings great joy...for awhile.

But the enemy knows us and knows how to work. And he even produces in us a great deal of guilt over forgiveness! *I’m forgiven...I sinned...I’m forgiven...I sinned again...What? You’re forgiven, Jesus died for you, and you still....are you ever going to stop?* He makes us believe that all we will ever be is a person who continues to repeat what sent Jesus to the cross. And so our faith looks like a life long series of *only failures* to become more of what God wants us to be. We get forgiven, we try again, but all we ever do is fail. And when this ongoing hell on earth is over, we die, and we stand before God to give a full account of all the ways we’ve blown it...we forgiven again, and then we get to go sing in the heavenly choir. Does that sound like salvation to you?

Well, here’s the good news – that is not the sum total of Christianity. There is a lot more. Under the Old Covenant, a Jewish boy was circumcised when he was eight days old. This circumcision was intended to be a symbolic sign of the covenant given to Abraham. Forever after, that boy would know that he was marked for God, set apart for God. But there was a much deeper meaning, veiled for centuries, until another Jew would explain the true meaning of circumcision:

“A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.” Romans 2:28-29

“In [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ.” Colossians 2:11

Here’s what that means. The cross didn’t just do something for us, it did something deep and profound to us. Remember, the heart is the problem. God understands this and he goes for the root of the problem. God joins us to the death of Christ. Our nature was nailed to the cross with Jesus, and we died there with Him and in Him. The Apostle Paul gets it. “The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.” Romans 6:10-12 Something is different here. What does this mean? Can we really battle the sinful nature? And if we do battle with it, we do it from what position? What’s different?

Remember our theme verses for today? “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” Psalm 51:10 “I will give you a new heart.” Ezekiel 36:26 Question for you: is a clean heart possible? What does it mean that we get a new heart? To understand, we need to understand something first.

Many people assume that the cross is the total work of Christ. The two simply go hand in hand – Jesus/Cross...Cross/Jesus. What about the Resurrection? Well, it's kind of impressive...but for many Christians it's like an afterthought. They believe it's important because it proves Jesus was the Son of God. But it's like the epilogue to the real story of the cross...it's the extra point after the touchdown; the medal ceremony after the Olympic event. You can see what we think is more important. What image do we put on our churches, Bibles, and jewelry? The cross...it's the symbol of Christianity worldwide. It's like the focal point...and that's not bad...but the cross is not the sole focal point of Christianity. Paul says so himself.

“If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith...If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” 1 Corinthians 14:14, 17 And look at these passages:

“In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus—Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.” Acts 1:15-16, 21-22

“The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.” Acts 4:1-2

“With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.” Acts 4:33

“Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.” Acts 17:18

The early Christian Church spent a lot of time talking about the resurrection, as well as the cross of Jesus. And it's important that we see them both. Christ died for us. And, Christ was raised for us. Remember how we began this series? “The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy. I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full?” John 10:10 We receive a new nature, a new life, a new heart from Christ. It has always been God's plan, not simply to forgive us, but to also restore us. Jesus said: “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.” Matthew 12:33, 35 Things have changed in us and for us. We are

not simply evil. Christ's life, death, and resurrection changes things in us. We have life...and have it to the full! We have new life in Christ and a new heart...a heart that is good.

The year is about 1450 BC. Somewhere in the deserts east of Sinai, a band of runaway slaves have pitched camp. In the middle of the camp, the nomads have erected a tent of goat hair and skins – a design given to them by God himself when he talked to Moses on the mountain. The tabernacle actually had two parts: the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place or Holy of Holies. It was in the Most Holy Place that the Lord would come and speak to Moses as his glory filled the whole tabernacle. This is true...and it is also a picture of something even more amazing. Look at this verse with me.

[“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” 1 Corinthians 6:19](#) [“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?” 1 Corinthians 3:16](#) Now, the temples of God's people always had a “Holy of Holies”. So where is the Holy of Holies in this new temple? YOUR HEART! Again, the words of Paul: [“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” Ephesians 3:17](#) The Lord comes down to dwell where? In our hearts! Agree? Good. Now watch this:

[“You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell.”](#)
[Psalm 5:4](#)

Does God dwell where evil dwells? So, what does that say about your heart? Now it makes sense what Jesus says.

[“Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briers. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. Luke 6:44-45](#)

[“The seed on the good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.” Luke 8:15](#)

Jesus himself teaches that at least for somebody, the heart can be good and even noble. Who is he talking about? He's talking about you...and all who are his by faith. God kept his promises...our heart has been circumcised to him. Do you know what that means? Your heart is good. Let that sink in for a moment. Your heart is good.

And that's where the war enters it's most personal level. Luther said at the same time we are both saint and sinner...*simul eustus et peccator* in the Latin. But that's different than you may have believed. The sinful part is the “Old” nature. In Christ, we have a “New” nature. And that is the real us! The two do battle...but we fight from a different position than we may have thought. We start from a blank slate created in the blood of Jesus...we start with forgiveness given to us. We start our battle with...a good heart.

[“Create in me a clean heart, O God.” Psalm 51:10](#)
[“I will give you a new heart.” Ezekiel 36:26](#)

What would happen if you truly believed that your default position had been changed by God? What would happen if you truly believed that your heart was good and that you could start from there, by God's grace and his indwelling power, to battle your old nature? I believe that changes things...it changes lives! And I believe that is an important truth in the Gospel message...a truth that has been lost to a great many people. Small wonder, huh? This is the last thing the enemy would want you to know. Why? Because it would change everything we have come to believe about our lives on this side of being brought to faith by God. If you have already known it...you know exactly what I'm talking about. This is freedom! This is life to the full! And if you haven't realized it yet, hang in there with us, because there's more.

There is a glory God has placed in you. And you have a role to play in the Kingdom you may have never dreamed of before. Join us next week as we continue our series with the message: "The Glory Hidden in Your Heart." AMEN.