

Progress of Redemption #09

by David Shirley

The sermon explores the need for God to speak, the method of revelation, and the response required, using the book of Job as an example of faithfulness to God in the midst of suffering.

Duration: 1:11:25

Scripture: Acts 1:16, Acts 4:25, Hebrews 4:6

Topics: "Redemption"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Job and how he went from prosperity to poverty, losing everything. Job's friends try to offer religious cliches and worn-out platitudes, but it is only when God speaks that the problem is solved. The preacher emphasizes the importance of humility and silence before God, using examples from the Bible such as Daniel's vision. The sermon also highlights the purpose of human suffering and the need to glorify God in all circumstances. The preacher encourages the congregation to find expression through the poetic books of the Bible and to allow their hearts to be softened by God's touch.

Transcript

We come to the third major time that God speaks. We've been looking at the need or the occasion for why God is speaking at this point in history. Then the content, what does he say? The method of revelation, how does God speak? And the response that he requires, what does God expect his people to do? And now, as we look at the Davidic covenant and the poetic books, the third major time God has spoken, we'll look at Job and Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon.

And the question we ask first is, what could possibly be the need at this time for God to speak? They have a theocracy, the grace of God, they have the law of God, they have the house of God. And so what is the need? This need came when the theocracy was at its highest glory. God is ruling his people in victory and in prosperity, but the need at this time is that these truths, that the reality of God should come and abide in men's hearts and lives.

The word in the heart, by word have I hidden my heart that I might not sin against thee. Heart for God is the great need at this time. And certainly we can see the relationship between the Davidic covenant and the poetic books.

The whole thing about being a descendant of David according to the flesh, the Davidic covenant, was so that Christ could sit on the throne of David, Romans 1.3. And if we go back again and check the genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3, and how Christ came through Nathan and not through Jeconiah or Jehoiachin. So when you think about royal authority, being able to rule on the throne, and that's the issue of the Davidic covenant, and you begin to look into the poetic books, the theme in the poetic books is that the heart be the throne and that God rule in your heart. And so at this time of the theocracy, it's very possible for things to be externally well, but internally were men's hearts ruling for God.

How well we remember that in 1 Kings 11.4 Solomon's heart was not perfect like David's heart. His wives had turned his heart away from following the Lord. And so this is the need for the heart to be ruled by God.

The content as we look through the poetic books, because they're in poetic form, they are the inner experiences of these five different men in different areas of life. For example, when you read Job, you see the heart of a man named Job during this time of suffering and questioning. You read Psalms and you see the heart of a man, perhaps David more than others, but also the heart of the people of God in various circumstances as they live and walk before God.

The heart is revealed. The inner experiences involved in these circumstances of life are revealed. In Proverbs, you see the heart of a man of God as he wisely faces the practical affairs of life.

In Ecclesiastes, you will see the heart of a man of God as he seeks meaning. And as he seeks that meaning outside of God, he expresses his heart. And then in the Song of Solomon, you see the heart of a man of God in the marriage relationship, or if you so desire, you might say in any intimate relationship, but specifically the marriage relationship.

So the content also has to do with the heart. We will come back and look at the content in a few minutes, but we've looked at the need and we've looked a little at the content in general. Now, let's think about the method through which God is expressing himself.

In these poetic book, it's in the form of a testimony usually. It seems that it's not God speaking, but rather man is speaking. And yet it is God speaking, but he's actually speaking in the experiences of a man who has in his heart what God wants to communicate.

And so the method that he chooses is sort of the living epistle method. And so they're just as much God speaking as when God is speaking at Sinai. They're just as inspired for all scripture is inspired by God.

In Acts 11.6, we read, Brethren, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who was God to those who arrested Jesus. So these things that David expressed were prophetic in the sense that it had to be fulfilled and it was spoke concerning Judas. In Acts 4.25, we'd read again, who by the mouth of our father, David, thy servant did say by the Holy Spirit, why did the Gentile rage and the people imagine vain things? And so as David is expressing these experiences, he has in his heart what God wants to communicate.

In Hebrews 4.6 and 7, it says, since therefore it remains for some to enter and to rest and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience. Again, he sets a certain day today saying through David. So long afterward in the words already quoted today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

And so David is speaking about the heart and God is using a method so that these experiences are experiences that all of his children can relate to. So when David says things like the Lord is my shepherd, God is speaking through him and that experience because God wants us to trust him as our shepherd. So this is the method that we'll see as we go through the content of the books, the method of living testimonies.

Now, what response does God require? He wants us to make these our very own words, to pray them, to sing them, to find expression in them. And that's why he gave us almost every experience in life is covered here. And we can find expression through these poetic books in a way that we won't find in any other type of scripture.

Let's just think about the subject of the book of Job, the problem of human suffering, the inequality and the injustice that we see in life has raised this question from the beginning. We come into life, we have absolutely nothing to do with bringing ourselves here. But as we grow up and our eyes begin to open, we look around and there's this question mark.

What's it all about? And the older we grow, the more we see the inequalities, the injustices and the question grows bigger. And we often are thinking, you know, how could a good God make a world like this? And yet, when Jesus comes, we see the most righteous, holy and just man that's ever been in this world. Yet he was the greatest sufferer that's ever been in this world.

He was a picture of God's suffering with his creation. And so we shouldn't have any problem believing that there's a good purpose in suffering. For Jesus learned obedience through the things that he suffered.

And as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, 12, we see through a glass darkly now, but then we're going to see face to face. We only know in part now and then we're going to know also as we are known. And so here is Job.

And he says he knows the way that I take, that is, God knows the way that I take. And when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. There's a race set before us.

Job was a real person, obviously, because Ezekiel 14, 14 says that though these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, they should deliver but their own souls. So Ezekiel refers to Job along with Noah and Daniel. He wasn't just a parable or a made up person, but he was a real person.

And perhaps the oldest book that we have in the Bible, and it deals with certainly the oldest question that's been around. Why do the godly people suffer? Well, when Jesus was here, his disciples in John 9, 2 expressed that they thought that suffering was the result of sin. But Job gives a completely different reason for that.

Job was being honored by God. It was true that God could actually trust Job to remain faithful to him in spite of everything. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could learn to thank God in all the things that happened to us? Well, the story here of Job is pretty much a simple one.

It opens with a scene in heaven and then tells how Job fell from prosperity into poverty. He loses everything. And then there's a discussion between him and his four friends.

He's got Eliphaz who's kind of a religious dogmatist or a Pharisee. And then his friend Bildad tries to just give him these little cliches and worn out platitudes. And then Zophar, his friend, comes along and he sort

of has all the right religious answers.

And Elihu, who is just a youth, comes. But finally, God speaks. And Job answers at last in a very humble spirit and the problem is solved.

That's sort of the story in a nutshell. And we see Satan has the most shallow view of all. He says that the only reason people serve God is because it pays riches and honor to serve God.

And that Job was just serving God because he was selfish. And when his prosperity ended, he would no longer be a godly man. And so God is going to allow this view of Satan to be tested.

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, who pretty much had the same view, they said that the unrighteous suffer because of their sins and the righteous are rewarded because of their righteous life. And so they reasoned that Job must have sinned. And so the suffering was the punishment for the sin.

In Job 4-7 they said, whoever perished being innocent. But Job just couldn't accept the accusation of his friends. He knew his heart was true and he showed them that their confession was false and he pointed out that there were a lot of wicked people in the world that prosper.

And so if your premise is true, then righteous people should be prosperous and wicked people should be poor. But look how many wicked people are prospering in the world. Well, Elihu comes along with a far more eloquent discourse and he defends God in it and he sees in the afflictions that come to us in life the chastisement of a father who cares for us and loves us.

And so suffering was God's discipline to bring his sons back into fellowship with him. And suffering was sent sort of to keep us from sinning to begin with, but that didn't explain the reason of suffering in Job. So the Lord comes and he explains to Job that for one thing, when we come to the end of ourselves, then God can lift us up.

If you read Job chapter 29, you'll find 52 different times the personal pronoun I, my, or me. It almost reminds you of reading Romans chapter 7. God wants the trials of our faith to work in and through us, to work patience. He wants to bring out the gold by fire to reveal the character in our lives so that Job is being intensely tested here.

But he says in Job 13, 15, though, he slay me, yet will I trust him. And you just wonder, even today, how much hangs upon your faithfulness to God. How much is weighted there in terms of the future? If you're faithful to God, the things that he's going to do.

And so we know from the New Testament when Jesus came and he died on the cross, the most righteous man that's ever lived and suffered greatly with our sin. And so the righteous suffer with the wicked today because sin fills the world with misery. And it's just a natural consequence of sin.

The godly man, as well as the sinner, is going to suffer because of the sin that's in the world. And so don't make the mistake of thinking that all suffering was God's way of punishing sin, because it wasn't. So though sin is obviously the result of suffering as part of a result of our sin.

But Job was walking with God in integrity in his heart, as was said in Job 1, 5. His conscience was right towards God. God trusted Job. Therefore, he assigned this problem of suffering to him.

And we learned that truly whom the Lord loves, he does chasten. And it's only the gold that's worth putting in the fire. James said, count all joy when you fall into diverse temptations, knowing this at the trine of your faithful work, patience in your life.

So God doesn't give us great gifts just to please ourselves. He doesn't give us great faith just to have faith. But the chief end of all men is to glorify God.

And when we see Jesus Christ, we see someone who pleased not himself, but someone who came not to do his own will, but he came down from heaven to do the will of his father who had sent him in to glorify God. And so through this, Job was broken. He was melted down and he was softened to the point he could say the hand of God has touched me.

God maketh my heart soft. And this is the need in all the poetic literature is we're getting to the heart and his heart is softened. I wonder if you ever sing the little song, Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me, melt me, mold me, feel me, use me.

Wow. Hope you know what you mean when you're saying that. But Job never really saw himself until he saw God.

It was a vision of God himself that actually completed the work in Job and brought him to the dust. And then you hear God speak to Job and Job 40 verse two says, shall he that contended with the almighty instruct him? How are you going to try to instruct the God of the universe when the wisdom of man is only foolishness with God? And so, you know, we hear Job answering in verse four. Behold, I am vile.

I'm absolutely worthless. I will lay my hand upon my mouth. But God kept dealing with Job till he came to the very end of himself.

And we read Job 42, three through six. Therefore, have I uttered that I understood not things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear.

But now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes. And so Job is chastened.

He's softened as the servant of God. And, you know, yet there was hope in his heart, so much so that Job was able to say that I know that my redeemer liveth and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh, I'm going to see God.

He had a tremendous hope in what God was going to do through Christ. And so he answered that question. If a man dies, shall he live again? Well, Jesus emphatically said in John 11, 25, He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.

And so Job was a perfect and upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil. That is, his moral conduct was impeccable. He had that beginning of wisdom to fear God.

He was straight in every way and he was complete. And so God was able to say of him in chapter 1, verse 8, There's none like him in the earth. What an honor God gives to him.

So watching as he's stripped of his wealth, as his children are taken away, his health is gone, and he loses his wife and finally even his friends. And so let's take just a closer look at the sections in the book of Job here. First, we see that Satan could do quite a few things to a man.

For example, in Job 1, Satan was able to bring up the host of the Sabians and the Chaldeans and have them carry away the oxen and the asses and all the camels of Job. It's pretty influential. Satan was able to slay the sheep by lightning falling from heaven.

He was able to cause the wind to kill Job's children. And he was able to even smite Job with boils. And as Ephesians 2, 2 describes him, he is the prince of the power of the air.

But thank God there are limitations. He's mighty, but God's almighty and he can break through only where God allows him to. And verse 10, you know, that's made clear.

There's no suffering or thing that can come to us from Satan except what the Father allows. And so Job 38, verse 8 and 11 says, he who has shut up the sea with doors and said, hitherto shalt thou come, but no further. And here shall thy proud waves be stayed.

This great creator is never going to let us be tempted above that which we're able. He'll always make a way for us to escape, as it says in 1 Corinthians 10, 13. So remember that Satan can only strike where he's given permission.

Well, he strikes and Job rinses his clothes. He feels the grief and the sorrow and he should. We're told not to despise the chastening of the Lord, but to be exercised by it.

And so even if it comes through an evil agency, we still must submit to it and know that somehow God's going to use it for our good. Jesus wept and he doesn't destroy our emotions. Jesus told the women of Jerusalem to weep for themselves and for their children.

Loss and sorrow are just part of life. And all the things that we possess are transient. Matter of fact, we're losing something every moment that we live.

Some of you are losing hair. Others of you, just your cells are dying in your body. And this is going on.

We can't stop and weep over everything that we're losing. And it's a hard lesson to learn that we live on in spite of all of our losses and that there's really only one thing that's necessary and that is God. That is to know Christ.

Nothing else is necessary. But God puts us in the fire and yet he's the one that's going to watch us while we're in the fire. He's going to try us personally.

He himself. And when the fires burn long enough, he's going to pull you out. And so God is the one that actually comes in chapter 1, verse 7 and speaks to Satan and he says, you know, where are you coming from? And we hear the answer from going to and fro in the earth and from walking up and down in it.

And, you know, you just think of the endless restlessness of evil and we should be sober. We should be vigilant because we have an adversary, the devil, and as a roaring lion, he's walking about seeking whom he may devour. He says, well, that's where I've been, just walking around the earth looking for prey.

Well, God says, well, have you considered my servant, Job? And you wonder why God brings up the issue. Considered, in other words, have you been trying to find a flaw in him? Have you been trying to find anything wrong with him? And Satan says, well, yeah, I guess I've seen him. Does Job fear God for nothing? You know, he's trying to find out exactly why this fellow is so perfect.

And Satan comes to the conclusion there's a reason. Has thou not made a hedge about him and about all that he hath on every side, which was true? And have you not blessed the work of his hands and his substance has increased in the land? That's true. Satan says, well, then put forth your hand now and touch all that he hath and he's going to curse you face to face.

Well, you know, it's not so much Job that's on trial here, but it's God. Is God able to keep that which we've committed unto him against that day? Yes, as 2 Timothy 1:12 says, absolutely, God is able to do it and he can make a way even when there seems to be no way and God will keep us from falling and he can present us faultless before his presence with great glory and rejoicing. And so God allows the test and he says, okay, it's fine.

Just take everything away from Job and we'll see what happens from there. And so he did. And now when the trials come, I'm sure Job didn't understand the meaning of all that was happening in his suffering.

We're not going to always understand what God is working out in our hearts. It's like in most battles, in most wars, unless you're able to stand back and have all the information, it's hard to understand what's happening on the battlefield. And we're definitely in a war and we're on a battlefield and we're wrestling with this spiritual forces and wickedness in high places.

But we can be sure of this, that there's a reason and there's a value to everything that God allows and that all things are working together for good for those that love God and to those who are called according to his purpose. And so in many ways, Job is a perfect example of that commentary in Romans 8:28, because no matter what's happening, God is working things out. So don't always try to find the reason for your trials.

You won't always understand all the experiences of life that you go through. Man's never going to find the answer to all of God's dealings because God's ways are past finding out. And so remember, you can never walk before God and try to lead a godly life without having Satan being your accuser, trying to find fault with you, trying to weight you down, trying to vex your spirit and to hinder you in every way.

And we see here, Job is a perfect and prosperous man. He's a praying man. He's popular with everyone and he's being proven in the fire.

But once this happens, note what happens with his friends. It seems like everyone has a reason to offer as an explanation for the experiences and problems of life. And so Job was rich in friends, no doubt, because generally when you lose everything and you lose your wealth and your health and your position and your family, you don't have many friends left.

But these were friends who came and they stuck through the adversity with Job. And you're impressed when you read it. They just came and sat for seven days and they didn't say anything.

They were just there. And sometimes when people are suffering, that's exactly what they need. Just someone, not so much to come and offer reasons for everything, but just to be there.

And they'd probably been better off if they would have just kept their mouth shut the whole time and just stayed there and been there for him and let him know they were there. And that's one of the values of doing things like hospital visitation, because there are people who benefit by you just being there. You don't have to go answer all their problems and explain everything about life, but just being there with them means something to them and ministers to them.

And at least you can say this, instead of going and talking about Job, which is what most people do in the churches today, they at least came and talked with him face to face, with the God that we had more of that. Well, they didn't prove to be that great of a comfort in the long run. Job is crying out from the ashes.

I can't understand what's going on. It just doesn't seem right. His wife says, well, there's something wrong.

Your religion's a failure. Curse God and die, which literally means say goodbye to God. It's the voice of despair.

She just says there's no answer there. God doesn't have the answer. Just say goodbye to God.

Then Eli says, well, God never makes a mistake. What have you done to bring this on yourself? And then Bildad says, well, God's just, so just confess your sin. And Zophar says, well, God's all wise.

He knows what's in man. There must be something there. And Eli, who really kind of says the wisest thing of all, he talks about how good God is and that we should look up and trust him because he is God and he may be causing this thing in order to keep you from sinning.

And so anyway, Job speaks and says in verse 42 and verse two says, I know that God thou canst do everything and that no thought can be withheld from thee. And then he makes that confession. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye sees thee.

Wherefore, I behold myself, count myself out, and I repent in dust and ashes. He comes to that point where there is the victory of submissive faith. And he knows that only God understands what's going on here in his life.

And the very greatest part of the book, chapters 38 to 42, where you have God gloriously revealing himself. And God says, who can do all these things except myself? And as so often is true, when Job comes into the presence of God, he forgets the little speech that he had thought up he might make. There's no arguing with God.

He just gets flat down on his face and begins to repent in dust and ashes. Because that's the only place you're going to really learn God's lessons is on your face with your mouth shut. It's interesting when Daniel received that final fourth vision in Daniel chapter 10, the same thing happened when the angel came to him.

Daniel's on his face, on the ground, and he says he's dumb. He just has his mouth shut. And then God touches, you know, allows him to be touched.

And he's on his hands and knees. Then he tells him to stand upright. And he's standing there trembling.

And he gets the vision of God because he's trembling before God, humble. And that's the place to learn our lessons. When Isaiah saw God, he saw himself as he really was.

And he fell on his face undone and cried out, I'm a man of unclean lips. So we want to measure our life by his life. And if we do, if we're conscious of God, we're going to collapse.

And we're going to be on our face before God and feel as Job did in our hearts. And at that point of humility, total confession of sin and acknowledgement of who we are, then God's going to commission us to serve him in a new and vigorous way. So this book in many ways is an illustration of Romans 8.28.

When you read of the patience of Job, you think that's wonderful how he was able to hold on to the testimony of God.

And you see the end of the Lord is pitiful and merciful and how the morning of joy follows that night of sorrow because he trusted in God. So Job found God in all of this trouble. And as God reveals himself, we discern that our finite minds are not going to be able to comprehend the infinite mind of God.

And so the lesson of the book seems to be that Job, because of the patient endurance of his sufferings, in the end, he comes to see God and he's rewarded in the end with greater prosperity, with greater blessedness than he ever had at the first. So he can say in Job 23.10, he knows the way that I take. When he's tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

I wonder how many races have been won because of the heart? How many athletic events have been won because of the heart? You know, Satan's charging, well, Job's heart's not right. And he served God for protection and for profit. And his friends are saying, well, whoever perished being innocent.

So Job maintains that his heart is right before God. And so it's a heart issue. And we know God trusted Job.

He trusted him to be put into fire so that he could have been proven. And so God's examining him. He says, take everything away.

And we'll see if he has a singleness of heart. Take everything out of his life, have him lose everything, and we'll see how wholly he trusts God. If there's only one thing that's needful, if nothing is necessary but Christ.

So we simply trust that God's ways are past finding out. We hold on to that testimony of God. And so God's able to say there's nobody like this guy.

His heart is pretty right on. And so I'm going to allow him to go through this test. So it's a wonderful thing to see God get the glory and to see him worshiping God in the end.

And we see in Job the kind of trust that God wants his children to have, that kind of trusting heart in every circumstance of life. And so the Lord doesn't answer all the insistent questions. He doesn't explain, but he does give to that suffering, anguished spirit such a sense of his own divine greatness, that is God's greatness, that when you see God, the questioning ceases in the simple peace of submission to God.

A heart broken and contrite, sitting at the feet of God, wanting nothing other than God himself. Oh, that our testing might bring us to this kind of faith for God's glory. And so if we look at the book of Psalms, we see a similar thing in that we see the heart of a man of God before his God in all and in every circumstance we can possibly think of in life.

They are Psalms of the heart. In fact, David, who's called the sweet psalmist of Israel, was a man after God's own heart. And we need to be able to express our consciousness of God in every circumstance of life to give God glory, to worship God.

And so we're talking about the psalter here, which is the solid gold of Christian experience. Every human experience is related to God somehow. And the Psalms give expression to these deep experiences and all these innermost feelings.

They go from the pits of despair to delights of the abundant life. In Psalm 37, it's delight yourself in the Lord, find real fulfillment, your spirits created to enjoy and to serve God. So set your heart to delight in him.

And this is acceptable worship before God when it comes from your heart. You're going to rest and be satisfied forever because the nature of his seed is in you and his spirit is going to lust to the point of envy, to the point where you delight to do God's will. And so no man, no devil, no circumstance, nothing can stop you from delighting in the Lord if it's in your heart to do it.

And in Psalm 42, you see, as the deer panteth for the water brooks, you will have to drink or you'll have to die. You just instinctively, like the deer, seek the river of water. And the next best thing to live in, you might say, and it's even better than living, is his loving kindness, the light of his presence, to know those pantings and longings, to have the insatiable desire for God within your heart.

That's life. It's not just religion and formality, but a living, moving, abiding, and close relationship with the living God. And so there are these special promises to fervent, eager appetites.

David fainted for a lack of the presence of God. He said, a day in thy courts, it's better than a thousand. Like a gazelle leaping gracefully and will not rest short of the streams.

Then, you know, not for a sip, but for a thirst-quenching drink of that water. Not for a sprinkle, but a submerging, a baptism of God and of his spirit. We would see Jesus in all of life.

And I tell you, God wants to satisfy us with his own life. So as we read through the Psalms, we see the reflections of hearts there. We see creation.

We see the imprecatory Psalms, those deep feelings of, you know, righteous indignation there. We see the problem of evil, the confession of sin, prayers of men in distress, and praise to God for his majesty and for the reign of God. God's word and how perfect it is for so many things that are found in the Psalms.

There's not an experience in life, hardly, that can't be found there. And so the same thing again in the Proverbs, we see the heart of a man as he's wisely facing practical affairs of life. It's sort of a detailed instruction book on how God's people ought to think and live.

And the primary teaching method is by contrast, the word but is found over and over again. And there's a contrast between God and man there in Proverbs, between time and eternity, between truth and false, between wealth and poverty, between purity and impurity, justice and injustice, pleasure and misery. And so even in social relationships, you've got the master contrasted with the servant, the rich with the poor, the husband with the wife, the parents with the children.

And so there are all these contrasts that are being made. And it covers every topic you can think of, from wisdom to sin, to the tongue, to wealth, to pride, to love, to pleasure, to success, to temperance, to morals, to youth. Just everything's in there.

And so God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the seashore. And that's what God gave Solomon. So wisdom being the key, but what is it? You know, where is it that, you know, the fool can say in his heart, there is no God.

And so the purpose of the book is that we might receive the instruction, the wisdom, the justice of God, and to know that it's really a matter of the heart. So we trust in the Lord with all of our heart. As Proverbs 3,

5, and 6 says, we don't lean on our own understanding.

We have a definite attitude of heart to follow God and to trust God. We also have a definite attitude of heart not to lean on our own understanding. In all our ways, we acknowledge him and he directs our path.

And he says, keep your heart with all diligence, put a watch over it, you know, put a password on it, because out of it are going to flow all the issues of life. Begin by fearing Adonai. The beginning of true knowledge is to fear the Lord, that's a heart matter to make him Lord.

Because as Proverbs 21, 2 says, every man's way is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart. And so God's concerned about the motivation that's within our heart. And so we see in Proverbs the heart of a man of God, but as it's related to making wise decisions and dealing with the practical affairs of life, but it's still a heart issue.

And then in Ecclesiastes, we see the heart of a man of God as he's seeking meaning. It's a real dramatic picture of the heart of someone who is really out of fellowship with God and everything is just vanity. And I'm pretty sure that's why you'll find passages in Ecclesiastes that seem a little bit at variance with other scriptures.

When you see the futility of the earthly goals as an end in themselves and every pursuit that man has, it's futile if God's excluded. And a part of the book of Ecclesiastes is to reveal to us and to show us what happens in the heart of a man when he's seeking meaning outside of God. What happens is vanity and frustration and all those pursuits are just futile.

And he begins finally, hopefully in the end he realizes only God's work endures. And only God can impart true value to a man's life and to the service that a man does on earth. And so it shows the vanity of achieving happiness by pursuing worldly values.

There's pursue worldly wisdom and that's vanity. Pursue pleasure, that's vanity. Labor is vanity.

Wealth is vanity. It's like what Jesus said in John, for you can ride over all the wells of this world, you'll thirst again. It's just plain vanity.

And yet when you get to the very, very end of the book, we read, fear God, keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man. Isn't that a heart matter? Yes, because the issue is who's going to rule here under the sun for God? Well, the one that's got his heart before God and lets God be Lord, fears God, keeps his commandments. From his heart, as Jesus Christ from his heart obeyed fully, this one's life is going to be filled with purpose and meaning.

And so, you know, you get the impression at the end of the book of Ecclesiastes that as a Christian, in many ways, you're just too big for this world. Because only something, and it's that someone who is above the sun, that someone who created the sun, that one is the only one that can meet your heart need. There's nothing in this small little world that can meet the need of your heart.

You were created too big for that. It takes the living God himself to fill your heart and your life with meaning. But when you receive him, then all of a sudden, every little thing in life can be done with meaning.

If you're just sweeping the floor, it can have meaning. Just driving down the road can have meaning because you have God. But without God, all your pursuits are meaningless and you know it.

Well, finally, the Song of Solomon, we see the heart of a man of God in the marriage relationship. And the whole book is given in Oriental language and imagery. I am my beloved and my beloved is mine.

And I like the way it ends, hurry my beloved, because that's certainly the way our heart feels about our relationship to Jesus Christ, particularly living in these last days. It's equal to what we read in the book of the revelation of Jesus Christ, even so come Lord Jesus, we desire to be with him and we desire that he would come and take us to be with him. So, you know, we read about this desire.

So what's been the need during this time of theocracy, this time when they had all the promises and covenants and they had the law and they had the temple, there was worship going on. It's God within us. It's the seed of heaven in us, causing us to really be born again, the mystery of the inward life of Christ.

And though in many ways it was not available yet, this intimate and personal experience and relationship that we have with the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, becoming a partaker as much as our experience allows us of God and the very nature of God, to have the true devotion to God in everything, everywhere, and to rightly know God, to worship and adore him as he is all and in all, or as Paul put it very succinctly, to live is Christ. Let's just meditate for a moment on some of the scriptures that deal with our hearts. Oh, that there was such a heart in them that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them and with their children forever.

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul, with all thy might. And these words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart. For the Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father and serve him with the perfect heart, with a willing mind. For the Lord searcheth all hearts and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found of you.

But if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever. And he did evil because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart and saves such as be of a contrite spirit.

Created me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou will not despise. My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed.

I will sing and give praise. Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. A sound heart is the life of the flesh.

A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken. The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge, but the mouth of fools feed on foolishness. All the days of the world are afflicted or evil, but he that is of a merry heart has a continual feast.

The preparations of the heart in man and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. Who can say I have made my heart clean? I am pure from my sin. The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron and with the point of a diamond.

It is graven upon the table of their heart. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart.

I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. And Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts.

Either make the tree good, and his fruit good, or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt, for the tree is known by its fruit. But those things which proceed out of the man come forth from the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.

These are the things which defile man. But to eat with unwashed hands defiles not a man. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God that perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurous up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. For when the Gentiles which have not the law do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves, which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts.

The meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another. In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel. Harden not your hearts as in the provocation in the day of temptation in the wilderness.

The Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance. But the Lord looks on the heart. Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place and forgive and do and give to every man according to his ways whose heart thou knowest.

For thou even thou only knowest the hearts of all the children of men. The Lord searcheth all hearts and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

O Lord thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my down sitting and mine uprising. Thou understandest my thought for all.

Thou compasses my path and my lying down and art acquainted with all my ways. For there's not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord thou knowest it all together. Thou hast beset me behind and before and laid thine hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain into it.

Where shall I go from thy spirit or where shall I flee from thy presence? If I send up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me and thy right hand shall hold me.

If I say surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day. The darkness and the light are both light to thee.

For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord and he pondereth all his goings. All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord weigheth the spirits. Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord pondereth the hearts.

I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them, and I will give them one heart and I'll put a new spirit within you and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and do them and they shall be my people and I'll be their God. But as for them whose heart walketh after the heart of their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their way upon their own heads, says the Lord God. You are they who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your heart.

And God which knoweth the hearts, bear them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us. And he that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. For the word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

All the churches shall know that I am he which searches the reins and hearts, and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. So may God's word be in your heart. Deuteronomy 11 18 says, Therefore shall you lay up these words, my words, in your heart and in your soul.

Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto you receive in your heart. Thy word hath I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee. And as newborn babes, we desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow by it.

We must have the word of God, the life of God, the life of God in the vine if we're to grow. And so the word of God must be received and laid up into our hearts. It needs to possess our minds, to fill our minds, and to just seep down deep into our hearts.

The heart is like the temple of God where God is to be worshiped, and the temple where God should fill all the rooms. We get understanding, but understanding needs to enter deep into our heart. And so when we memorize something and we reflect upon something, it begins to get closer to our heart.

When we actually receive it by faith and really believe it enough to begin to act upon it, then we've received it into our hearts. It stays there in our hearts. It's secure there in our hearts.

And our will is surrendered in love to the word of God. So the heart becomes the sanctuary of God. And we at that point can cry out and say, thy law is within my heart.

Now God has asked for your heart. He wants your love. He wants all of you.

And He'll receive you if you give Him, as He said, my son, give thine heart. And if you give Him your heart entirely, He'll take your heart and He'll fill it with Himself, and fill it with His word, and fill it with His spirit. And God wants His word to fill our hearts and to rule our hearts.

So when you have the word of God, you actually have God Himself working in you. If God's word is in your heart, then God is there willing. And He's wanting you to receive His word and to lay up His words in your heart so that He can greatly bless you through His word.

And that's why He says lay up these words in your heart. Now, the thing we need to do is to make it a matter of resolve on our part to begin to lay the word of God upon our heart, to just meditate on them, to repeat them, to think of them. Because the word of God is like seed, and seed needs time.

It's got to be kept in the ground for a while before it is heated and comes out and the life begins to grow. And so we too need to take the seed of the word of God and we need to treasure it and hide it down into our hearts. And after a while of treasuring the word of God in our hearts, then we'll begin to notice something interesting.

And that is that seed that we treasured a while back and have kept in our hearts begins to grow. And there are things different about our life. There are desires that are different that weren't there before.

New desires begin to grow out of the word of God that's being treasured in our heart. We have new power that we can't quite understand because it's coming out of that word of God that was treasured in our heart. We have love.

We have joy and peace. Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord and in his law that he meditate day and night. When your heart becomes the temple of God and you fill your mind and heart with his thoughts and faithfully open up your heart to God every day to hear his voice, to carry his word with you wherever you go in your heart and in your mind, then you will slowly begin to realize just how faithful God is to his word and how God will open up your heart and how God will hear your prayers because you'll be praying the word of God that's living and abiding within you.

And so we need to practice receiving the word for what it is, God's word, the word of the father. And we're God's child and we would receive his word, ponder it, meditate on it, think on it, then it's going to have a tremendous effect on our hearts. That word have I hid in my heart.

Oh how I love thy law. It is my meditation all the day. So even if you get to those places in the word of God where some things seem rather difficult to understand, just continue to read and to reread and to put it on your heart.

The father has given you his promise that he's going to make it a blessing to your heart. But you got to first take it into your heart. You've got to believe that God will, if you do your part and take it into your heart by his Holy Spirit, he's going to make that word living and powerful within you.

So take that step of faith and get the word of God in to your heart. And our father who said, my son, give me your heart. Then he's the one that will give you a new heart.

If we lay up his word and keep his commandments in our hearts, there'll be a complete strength to walk with God and to do the things that God would desire. To have the conviction and the power that comes from the living and abiding word of God. Oh Lord, we just pray that you would cause us to enter into your word and all of these experiences of life.

That you would rule in our hearts by your word, by your spirit. We pray for your glory in Jesus name. Amen.

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