



Much Forgiveness...Much Love

Therefore say, “Thus says the Lord God: I will gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of among the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.’ And when they come there, they will remove from it all detestable things and all its abominations. And I will give them a new heart, and put a new spirit within them; 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 obey them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

Ezekiel 11:17-20

No doubt, we all would agree that the beginning of this prophecy’s fulfillment, the getting of a heart of flesh for a heart of stone, takes place on Calvary.

There is only one thing in all the world that is able to pull out that heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh and that’s the death and resurrection of the Lamb.

But what bothers us is that we are followers of the Lamb.

We gather in His name.
We partake of His Body and His Blood.
We’ve committed our lives to His service.
We’re dependent upon His Spirit for our life.

And yet, when we look into our hearts,
we still see stone instead of flesh.

Who of us can honestly say that our heart of stone is gone and now we are ruled within by a mercy, and a kindness, and a generosity and a compassion which comes from God---all the time?

Who of us doesn't have to admit that time and time again people who don't even know the Lord put us to shame by their kindness, and their generosity, and their willingness to give of themselves?

"Lord, why am I so indifferent, so callous, so hard? I've been following you for years. I pray to you. I pray for other people. I call on your name. And yet, this stony heart is still here. What does it take to get it out? And what will it take for me to get a heart like yours, Lord?"

Surely, the blood of Jesus is sufficient to give us a new heart.

It's not that it can't handle our sin.
It can take care of this problem very well.

The Son of God hangs on that cross ...
and the blood runs down that body...
gathers in a pool at the foot of the cross...
overflows as a stream...
that soon becomes a river.

The river of blood flows out over the earth down through the generations. People gather on its banks and gaze at this and ask,

"Where does this river of blood come from?" And the Spirit answers

"From the broken, dying heart of God himself."

"But why is God's heartbroken?"

"Because God suffers with every creature of His that suffers."

"He bears the weight not only of the suffering, but of the sin that causes it, and so His heart breaks unto death and we have this river."

"But what good does it do", we ask. And the Spirit answers, "Anyone who plunges into this river and bathes, with a contrite heart, is given a heart of flesh for a heart of stone."

Suddenly, the Spirit lifts you up, just like He took Ezekiel, and carries you to a place where you can look down upon a town loaded with churches, churches everywhere. And here comes this river of blood flowing right down the middle of it. You are informed by the Spirit that there is not a soul in the whole town who hasn't been baptized in that river of blood. "What a wonderful town that must be", you say, "Everybody in town has a heart of flesh for a heart of stone." "Would that it were so", answers the Spirit, "If only what you say were true." "But didn't you just say that everybody in the town bathed in the river?" "Yes." "Well, doesn't that

bring about the change?” “No, it’s possible for people to bathe in the river of blood, but if the blood doesn’t get below the skin to the heart, the heart still comes up stone.” “You mean”, you ask,” that those people in their churches right now, praising the blood of the Lamb, may still have hearts of stone?” And the Spirit answers, “Look at the poor in the shadows of those churches that are getting no attention. Watch how they back bite with each other. See how the ones who have food hoard it while the other ones over there starve. Their doctrines seem to be right, but their hearts are made of granite. “But why”, you ask, “Why didn’t you do anything for them when they bathed in that river?” And the Spirit ends the conversation with a very strange answer, “He who is forgiven little, loves little. Then He whips you off to another place, beyond that town of churches, where the river of blood flows by some rusty old railroad tracks. And there, a group of social lepers are gathered around the fire for their evening meal. There is a sharing, and a kindness and a warmth among those people that makes it clear that they no longer have the burden of a heart of stone, they have hearts of flesh. And you are told by the Spirit that every single day that group is growing as they move out to the wilderness by the tracks and pull in more of those lepers, bringing them down to the river. And everyone comes out with a new heart. “How come it happens so quickly for them, so easily?” you ask.

And the Spirit answers,

“He who is forgiven much...loves much.”

One of the Pharisees invited him to eat with him. He entered into the Pharisee’s house, and sat at the table. Behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that he was reclining in the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of ointment. Standing behind at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and she wiped them with the hair of her head, kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, “This man, if he were a prophet, would have perceived who and what kind of woman this is who touches him, that she is a sinner.” Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” He said, “Teacher, say on.” “A certain lender had two debtors. The one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they couldn’t pay, he forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him most?” Simon answered, “He, I suppose, to whom he forgave the most.” He said to him, “You have judged correctly.” Turning to the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered into your house, and you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave me no kiss, but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss my feet. You didn’t anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.” He said to her, “Your sins are

forgiven.” Those who sat at the table with him began to say to themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

Luke 7:36-50

Jesus could tell by observing this woman that she already has a heart of flesh for a heart of stone. Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.

Much love was flowing with those tears and through those hands that were caressing Jesus' feet with her hair.

Love that was pure. And love that was unselfconscious --
didn't care what those Pharisees sitting there would think.

And that “much love” is evidence of much forgiveness.

Does this mean that the Pharisee doesn't need as much forgiveness?

Obviously not!
His need is just as great as that woman's.

The only problem is that the man hides his need from himself.

On the surface he looks okay, but down inside he has thoughts that would curl anybody's hair. And he has a hardness that is conveying death to the people around him. And he knows this. But it is so easy to cover it all over with respectability, a few good deeds, forms of piety. The fact that the man loves little, is evidence that he has been forgiven little.

Now forgiveness was available to him.
All the forgiveness he needed for the mess inside his heart was there,
but he wasn't letting it happen.

Now let's suppose after Simon the Pharisee listens to Jesus' words. He begins to see himself in a new way.
Suddenly he realizes he's not Simon the Righteous

... but he's a hopeless mess, and he's an evil, ugly man inside.

He needs help.

And there in front of all his fancy Pharisee friends, Simon begins to weep. He calls his servants and asks them to go out and try to find that woman. “Bring her, beg her to come back so we can treat her the way we should.” Then he gets up from the table and falls on his face at Jesus' feet and cries out for help, “Lord, help me. Forgive me as you forgave that

woman even though I am far, far worse. And Jesus stretches out his hand and touches that man and declares him forgiven. Instantly all his Pharisee friends, like an army, rise up from the table and stomp out. The next day, Simon receives notice that he has been excommunicated from the synagogue.

But he has one thing that really matters, and makes all the difference in his life.

He now has a heart of flesh for a heart of stone.

He who is forgiven much...loves much.

And if there is anything you and I need,

it's much forgiveness.

We Christians, we Spirit-filled, true disciple-type Christians... need much forgiveness.

And to get that "much forgiveness", we don't have to go out and commit that great big sin, all we have to do is open our eyes and see what's really there.

"Lord, show us the shape we're in. Help us to see that our sin is not just theoretical, something we deduce from scripture... 'All have fallen short of the glory of God'; therefore I must be a sinner, but real sin. Our sin."

Sin that grieves and breaks the heart of God and wounds the lives around us, and leaves behind a whole trail of discouragement and desolation as we have pursued our own happiness.

- The Lazarus who sits by our gate right now, still full of sores, we don't even see him.
- The people with needs of body and soul that we have to brush by every single day and we do it so we don't have to touch them.

That's what Jesus died for -- **our sin.**

God help us to cry out for the "much forgiveness" that we need. When is the last time you admitted you needed much forgiveness?

Not five years ago when you got saved...but now.

Not Aunt Susie or Uncle Ned...but me.

When we cry for much forgiveness, we get much forgiveness.

When we come to the Lord's table today desiring forgiveness, much forgiveness that we need, we get much forgiveness.

“This is my body given for you.”
As if only for you.

“This is my blood shed for your sins.”

Not the theoretical sins...the real sins.

And the real disposition that's in there.

And when you and I begin to live before God as men and women who have received much forgiveness, the hearts of stone will at last begin to melt.

Our disposition,
our outlook,
our attitude,
our thought life, will change.
Our walk will change.

And all that self-consciousness and that reserve will melt away like it did for that woman and we'll break out of our shell and begin to live for God lives that are ruled by His love.

***“And I will give them a new heart,
and put a new spirit in them;
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 obey them;
and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.***

Prayer

Yes, Lord help us to truly cry out for “much forgiveness”. Melt our hearts of stone... open us to your forgiveness so that we may have hearts of flesh that are ruled by your love and in awe of your mercy.

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