

WITH ALL YOUR HEART



Devotion By Anke Wiemer

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?". Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord your God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that he is one, and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

Mark 12:28-34

The first time it happened no one seemed to notice. But soon it became an epidemic. It began one Sunday afternoon around three o'clock... a fine new suburban church building simply collapsed. There was no fire and no explosion...it just crumbled together as if a huge unseen foot had stepped on it. Some urban believers were slightly amused when they read about it in the paper. The following Sunday an inner-city church suffered the same fate ...the magnificent architecture which had drawn tourists for generations became rubble in a few seconds. This caused some gloating among some non-institutional Christians who took pride in the fact that they never met in church buildings. The following Sunday these "New Testament" Christians had barely emerged from their house meeting when the house fell to the ground.

As the investigators began to probe, they learned that in each instance the congregation had been visited on the day of their building's collapse by an elderly man who was described by witnesses as having "wild looking eyes." Was it Elijah?

Congregations began to watch the door apprehensively, wondering if today this strange visitor would find his way to them.

One Sunday morning the elderly man with "wild looking eyes" turned up before the service at a church which had a reputation for laying heavy emphasis on total commitment and discipleship. One of the brothers in the flock approached the stranger. "Sir, we're all petrified. We know what has happened to the building of every congregation you've visited. We know this is some form of judgment ...but for what? Where were they found wanting?"

"They were judged," answered the stranger, "for their mediocrity. Mediocre prayers ...mediocre lives ...lukewarm hearts ...lazy minds. The living God has given these people his very best. In love, God has given them all he has: his only begotten Son ...purchased them back from the curse of the second death with Jesus' blood. And what do they give back to God? ...their scraps ...their leftovers. Would that they were either hot or cold. But because they are lukewarm he spews them out of his mouth!"

"Well," answered the Christian from the 'total commitment' church, "on that basis we should pass the test. There isn't a church in town that preaches a tougher message on commitment than ours."

At 3:00 p.m. the church collapsed like all the rest.

....and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength

Of course, the judgment which has already begun at the house of God does not concern itself with buildings of brick and steel ...but it does concern itself with the kingdoms we build which are not the Kingdom of God at all. It is possible for me to be very earnest about building a name for myself, or a new form of religious community, or a reputation for my church ...while my heart toward God remains lukewarm. One day all the things I have built out of earnestness for myself, (while my inmost heart for God was lukewarm), will indeed come down.

Suppose the Master of the house returns to the servants to whom he has given talents to find the five talent man in high elation ...he has a surprise for the Master. Instead of delivering five talents more for the five he had received, he says, "Master, come into the yard, I have something wonderful to show you. You gave me five talents. I amassed fifteen more. With the twenty talents I made this..."

He pulls out a chord and unveils a bronze statue of himself holding a Bible. The Master orders him into outer darkness.

The vast bulk of all the things we like to think we have done for the Lord were done, not for him, but for ourselves. Consider how in our thought life, our prayer life, our business life and family life, whatever is excellent is reserved for ourselves ...God gets the mediocre.

Cain brings an offering which may appear acceptable to every eye but God's. God sees this offering as the expression of a lukewarm heart. And this mediocre offering is not an offering even as mediocre prayer is not prayer. Any half-baked mediocre thing we bring to God is worse than if we brought nothing ... it is blasphemy.

When the merciful and living God decided to deliver us from the curse of death and the bondage of Satan, he did not go to the spiritual junk yard and look for the wreckage of some ruined angel. He took the best he had ... the Son who lived in his very bosom ... his supreme joy and only treasure ... his best ... to redeem us. And when the Son of God appeared clothed in human flesh, did he yawn and say to himself, "Well, what else can I do? I'll shuffle through this somehow."

He put himself into it with all his heart, soul, mind and strength ... everything he did was quality.

If you have doubts about the person of Jesus, read the Sermon on the Mount in any language. How can any thinking person doubt that this is the most beautiful and penetrating arrangement of words ever to touch this earth? And when Jesus healed he made sure the healing was complete. The blind man whose vision was imperfect after the first touch was touched again.

When Jesus fed the multitudes he fed them with abundance.

When he laid down his life he laid it down with all his heart.

And when we ask Jesus to touch our lives, his touch is perfect.



Touched by the Sky Anke Wiemer

***Who forgiveth all thine iniquities.
Who healeth all thy diseases.
Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;
Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.
Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things;
So that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.***

**But the blessing has to be received as it is given ...
with the whole heart.**

Nothing Jesus has done for you will have any lasting effect until you take hold of it with all your heart ...with all your soul... with all your mind and with all your strength.

And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that he is one, and there is no other but him, and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. "And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

If we want to live in God's kingdom now ... as opposed to our own religious kingdoms which will surely crumble ... here are three simple things to keep in mind:

1. Put your heart into receiving God's mercy.

The mercy of God cannot flow into a half-opened heart. Yet how many times when the Son of God knocks on the door we're afraid to open it more than a crack. "What if he puts his foot in?" Have no fear. The Lord will not force his way in ... he will not enter until you open the door wide and bid him welcome.

This opening of the heart to receive the Lord's mercy needs to be done daily ... hourly ... until it becomes our second nature to draw our life and our strength from him who is the incarnation of divine mercy.

***My soul thirsteth for thee. My flesh longeth for thee
in a dry and thirsty land where no water is.***



In the Deep Anke Wiemer

2. Put your heart into your daily prayers.

Some of us pray with our mouths ...some of us put in the time while our minds wander the earth. How easily for all of us to slip from prayer into a journey through the past, or into some pressing anxiety, or even into sleep. And the reason is that we are not approaching the Throne with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We need to put our

best into it even if we have to begin by saying; "Lord, I don't know how to pray ...help me!" When such a cry begins to rise from the heart, the answer is already on its way.

3. Put your heart into showing mercy to your neighbor.

How often we find ourselves half listening to someone who is pouring out his soul ...we simply are not putting our heart into it. Or, we catch ourselves going through the motions of good deeds while our hearts are tepid. What a change takes place in the quality of our work in the vineyard when we approach our neighbor's need with a merciful heart ... an alert and thoughtful mind.



Perhaps we feel that we have been placed in a rather boring corner of the vineyard. The people who come to us with their needs seem to be so uninteresting or so hopeless. "Will they ever come out of their rut? Will they ever change?" But what a refreshing wind begins to blow through these relationships when we put our hearts into them and begin dealing with these people as before the eye of a Lord who loves them with the same unspeakable love which has transformed us.

When our hearts are in it, God is in it ... redemptive grace flows in abundance.

God who gave his best ... his everything ... his Only Begotten ... to redeem us and make us his children waits for us as we are right now, (for all our hang-ups and problems), to love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to show our appreciation for the death and resurrection of Jesus by loving our neighbors as ourselves ... by showing mercy.

If we will do that, when Elijah comes, the structure will stand.

Prayer: Lord we want to take hold of all you offer us with our whole hearts. Tender, beautiful Lord you deserve no less. Forgive us for our lukewarmness, our mediocrity in the face of such unfathomable mercy. Thank you, thank you for putting your whole heart into your offering for us. Thank you for your perfect touch. May we accept your touch with our whole hearts. May we seek your mercy with every breath we draw. May our prayers be alive, and rise from our hearts to you the Living God. And Lord may we pour our hearts into those who are hurting around us like you pour your whole heart into us.

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