

Have a Heart

A Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit – part 1

a) Word and Spirit...

Have you noticed, Spirituality SELLS. It's not so much about ORGANISED RELIGION any more. It's about being SPIRITUAL. Which can include all kinds of options.

Let me read you an ad that came through the email recently. It's advertising the website www.spiritualactions.com

The email message says this. It says, "This is all about SPIRITUAL PSYCHIC READING, SPIRITUAL HEALING, SPIRITUAL COUNSELING, SPIRITUALITY, SPIRITUALISM ETC. You'll REALLY LOVE this website.

Interesting. I clicked the link. But by the time I got there, the website was GONE. Spiritual Actions Dot Com was one of those internet con jobs that I guess TOOK PEOPLES ORDERS for crystals and cosmic mantra books and took their money. THEN DISAPPEARED in a puff of electrons.

But the point is, Spirituality can mean almost anything you like. You can add SPIRITUAL as an adjective or an adverb to almost anything. So I'll recite my SPIRITUAL MANTRA, and I'll sit in my spiritual LOTUS position, and I'll go for some SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING to get my SPIRITUAL HEALING.

Of course, for Christians, Spirituality has a more precise meaning. At least, for most Christians. Christians are talking in general about the PERSON and the WORK of the SPIRIT OF GOD in his people. The Bible generally calls the Spirit of God the HOLY SPIRIT, which we're going to see over the next few weeks gives us a SURPRISINGLY USEFUL CLUE to what the HOLY SPIRIT is all about.

But even among Christian, talking about the HOLY SPIRIT can be controversial. And so you'll find all sorts of different claims and different expectations, and even according to some people DIFFERENT

EXPERIENCES of what the Holy Spirit is all about. That at one end of the scale at least almost seem to MERGE PERFECTLY with the sort of SPIRITUALITY the world talks about.

Over this weekend we're going to build up a BIBLICAL PICTURE of the HOLY SPIRIT. And what it means to actually BE SPIRITUAL in the Christian sense of the word.

We're going to take what the Bible says SERIOUSLY. Which is a good thing to be doing, because the bible actually claims itself to be INSPIRED by GOD'S SPIRIT. All Scriptures are GOD BREATHED. The WORD, we're told, is the SWORD OF THE SPIRIT. What the SCRIPTURES SAY ABOUT GOD'S SPIRIT, is INSPIRED BY GOD'S SPIRIT. And so should shape our expectations of what it actually MEANS... to be a PERSON OF THE SPIRIT.

Which is an interesting thought for the sort of people who want to say that EMPHASISING BIBLE TEACHING is somehow LESS SPIRITUAL than what they do at some other churches that don't teach from the bible at all.

One guy in our previous church, he came to see me one day to say he and his family were LEAVING THE CHURCH. Because, he said, it was SO UNSPIRITUAL the way I spent time PREPARING MY SERMON.

I said it was because I wanted to PROPERLY UNDERSTAND what the Spirit was SAYING IN GOD'S WORD. Tony said, the thing to do was just come on a Sunday completely UNPREPARED. And let the SPIRIT DO THE TALKING. And I assume any necessary preparation.

More recently, the girl who left for the same sort of reason. She said, I'm TIRED of all this BIBLE STUFF. I'm leaving to find a SPIRITUAL CHURCH. Which she did. Apparently.

Like I said, there are DIFFERENT VIEWS among Christians. But we're going to be building up what's called a BIBLICAL THEOLOGY of the HOLY SPIRIT. Picking up the thread that runs RIGHT THROUGH THE BIBLE. And gives us a sense of what Christians should EXPECT from the Holy Spirit. What role the HOLY SPIRIT actually HAS in the life of a Christian. What a CHURCH SHOULD look like where the Holy Spirit is at work.

Maybe people have said things about your church like they have about my church. *“Well, it’s not a very SPIRITUAL church; I just come here for the TEACHING.”* I wonder if that’s true? Or if it’s reflecting a misunderstanding of what a SPIRITUAL CHURCH will actually look like when you meet it in the flesh?

These are big questions. And because of that, they’re questions we need to take seriously. And really put our minds to. First and foremost, I want to challenge you this weekend to broaden your mind to appreciate the BIG SWEEP of what the Old Testament looks forward to as the BIGGEST EVENT IN HISTORY... when GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT... comes to CHANGE HIS PEOPLE’S HEARTS.

b) How Can You Mend a Broken Heart?

Funny the way we talk about the HEART. Like, Britney was HEARTBROKEN when she broke up Kevin. Or was it the other way around? The heart, in the way we use the term, is the SEAT OF OUR EMOTIONS. Where the TEARS come from. Where the JOY is. In biblical language, though, the heart isn’t just the seat of the emotions. But the core of the PERSONALITY. The heart in biblical terms is the CENTRE OF YOUR BEING. The place of your DEEPEST DESIRES.

Which means it’s also the CORE OF THE PROBLEM... between US... and GOD.

Now I’ve got to warn you we’re in for some bible flipping today. Because we’re going to cover some ground.

But I want you to start just a few pages in from the front cover. In Genesis chapter 6.

PPT – Genesis 6:5 and PAGE NUMBER

I’m sure you’ve seen it often enough before, the way the bible opens with the GOOD and PERFECTLY DESIGNED CREATION. Man and woman at the very pinnacle of it all. Made in God’s IMAGE. And yet made to live under God’s authority.

Which as you see in Genesis chapter 3, is something that humanity just doesn’t want to do. When it comes to the ultimate obedience test in the garden, Adam and Eve say they’d rather decide GOOD AND EVIL for themselves. Which is actually a SNAPSHOT of human nature.

- humanity has a heart problem (Gen 6:5)

Genesis 6 verse 5 sums it up. It's a HEART PROBLEM. And if you can, it's worth flipping over to it in your bible.

The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that EVERY INCLINATION OF THE THOUGHTS OF HIS HEART was ONLY EVIL... all the time. ⁶ The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and HIS HEART was filled with pain.

It's not that man's INCAPABLE of doing good. It's just that from the heart, he doesn't really want to. Not inclined to.

And so in that famous passage in Genesis 12, GOD STARTS AGAIN. With the man Abraham. And the nation Israel. Who he calls to be HIS PEOPLE. Living under HIS RULE in the PROMISED LAND. Like it should have been in the beginning.

- a warning on the Doorstep (Dt 29)

We're going to pick the story up well down the line. Where the descendants of Abraham, they're about to CROSS THE RIVER JORDAN and come in to the promised land. And their leader MOSES has a stern word with them before they do.

We had visitors to dinner the other night, with two young daughters. And I heard their dad giving them the same sort of little lecture. USE YOUR BEST MANNERS. Or you'll sit in the car.

It's that sort of stern word of warning that starts in Deuteronomy 29 and runs through to chapter 30.

PPT – Dt 29-30 Page number

And I want you to turn to it. Because in MY VIEW, these are some of the most important verses in the whole of the Old Testament. And particularly important – if you want to understand what the Bible says about the HUMAN HEART. And the HOLY SPIRIT. They're important verses, because they spell out in ADVANCE the way the whole of the story of the Bible is going to unfold. These verses are like the TABLE OF CONTENTS for the rest of the Bible.

Pick it up in Deuteronomy 29 verse 18. Imagine the scene. MOSES, long flowing beard, standing on the mountain; a word of warning, before they TAKE THE PROMISED LAND. And you know what he wants to talk about? He wants to talk about their HEARTS.

And he says, in verse 18, ¹⁸ Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose HEART TURNS AWAY from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison.

You're about to go in to the promised land. But if your HEARTS ARE UNFAITHFUL, you'll be OUT AGAIN... ON YOUR EAR.

Can I tell you, without spoiling the story too much, that's EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENS. I mean, the Israelites, you've just got to keep reading and they're a DISASTER.

They worship idols, they intermarry with the pagan nations around them, they sacrifice their kids, they neglect the temple; the LAW GOD GIVES THEM THROUGH MOSES, the COMMANDMENTS and the RULES that make them God's distinctive people... THEY KEEP THE RITUAL BITS... and they THROW AWAY THE SUBSTANCE. Because the reality is, their HEARTS are completely TURNED AWAY FROM GOD.

And so as you follow the story through the Old Testament, it's a story of disintegration. Just take EVERYTHING MOSES WARNS THEM ABOUT and watch them do it. And by the end of the SECOND BOOK OF KINGS, it's over. Israel is smashed and scattered. The Israelites are in EXILE in Babylon. And it seems like the story is over.

- In Case of Emergency (Dt 30:1-6)

Except, of course, we haven't read what Moses says in the first few verses of Deuteronomy chapter 30.

You might have heard, they're trying to encourage people with mobile phones to store an entry with the label "I.C.E." - In Case of Emergency. So you store the number of the person you want contacted if you're in an accident or you're found unconscious outside the pub on a Friday night. Not a bad idea.

Well here's the same thing. IN CASE OF EMERGENCY. As the Israelites are about to go into the promised land, Moses looks to the future and he says, if your HEARTS TURN AWAY, you'll be scattered. But IN CASE OF EMERGENCY, remember this. You're the people of God. And there's nothing he'll be longing for more than to have you TURN BACK TO HIM WITH ALL YOUR HEARTS.

It'll be like the story of the prodigal son. No matter how far you've gone, no matter how wide you're scattered. In Case of Emergency, do this. It's in verses 1 to 6 of Deuteronomy chapter 30. And I want you to notice how many times the word HEART comes up.

¹ When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you TAKE THEM TO HEART wherever the Lord your God disperses you among the nations, ² and when you and your children return to the Lord your God and OBEY HIM WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND ALL YOUR SOUL according to everything I command you today, ³ then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes ^[b] and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.

Even if you've been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, it's not too far. God will gather you up, and bring you back. And things, verse 5, will be better than ever before.

And most particularly, will you take a look at verse 6, if and when that happens, GOD WILL actually CHANGE THEIR HEARTS. Circumcision was the JEWISH MARK OF INCLUSION. Marking the body. But this is different.

In case of Emergency, TURN BACK TO GOD with ALL YOUR HEART AND SOUL... and verse 6, when you do that... The Lord your God will CIRCUMCISE YOUR HEARTS and the HEARTS OF YOUR DESCENDANTS... so that you MAY love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

There'll be a whole new START. With a WHOLE NEW HEART. A whole new attitude... that actually LOVES GOD. And LOVES WHAT GOD LOVES. That if they FIND THEMSELVES IN A FARAWAY PLACE, all they have to do is WHOLEHEARTEDLY TURN BACK. And God will do the rest.

c) The Prophets – Proclaiming the Inevitable

As I said, that's the TABLE OF CONTENTS for the rest of the Bible.

And as it plays itself out, you've got the PROPHETS, who keep REMINDING THE ISRAELITES what Moses has said. Often we get the idea that the biblical prophets were a bit like FORTUNE TELLERS. Predicting the future. But the point is, most of the time they're just PREDICTING THE INEVITABLE. And reminding Israel what's already been said. Especially here. In the words of Moses as they're about to come in to the promised land.

PPT Jeremiah 31 – page

- a new heart (Jer 31)

And so let's go to JEREMIAH. Hundreds of years later. A prophet with the tough job of SOUNDING THE WARNING... just as the axe is about to fall. A prophet who finds himself in PRISON for the crime of TREASON. DISLOYALTY TO THE KING. Because to say God's going to hand his people over to the Babylonians, to say KING ZEDEKIAH'S GOING TO GET THRASHED BY THE BABYLONIANS, it's like standing in Townsville and barracking for the Tigers. And takes a particular type of courage.

And yet even then, even with disaster just around the corner, JEREMIAH CAN SEE BETTER DAYS AHEAD.

And inspired by God's Spirit, look at what he says. Jeremiah 31.

The whole chapter, it's about a JOYFUL RETURN. By a humbled Israel. Verse 19. Jeremiah's actually seeing this in a DREAM. And the tribe of the Ephraimites, they're saying, AFTER I STRAYED, I REPENTED. They're saying, I was ashamed and humiliated. BUT NOW I'VE LEARNT MY LESSON.

And so God's going to DO WHAT HE SAID. And bring them home. Verse 31, I'll make a NEW COVENANT with them. Different from the one that came before. Because in verse 33, this time... I'll PUT MY LAW IN THEIR MINDS... and WRITE IT ON THEIR HEARTS. I'll change them from the INSIDE. And they'll be my people.

It's QUITE A DREAM. And exactly what MOSES was talking about ALL THOSE YEARS BEFORE.

We've got one more stopping point.

PPT – Ezekiel 36

- a new Spirit (Ezek 36)

Turn over just a few more pages. To the prophet EZEKIEL. Who a few years later watched while JERUSALEM was turned to ash. Who watched as his countrymen are led off in chains. Who watched while the TEMPLE is torn down stone by stone.

And yet who keeps exactly the same HOPE.

And explains just ONE MORE STEP.

Ezekiel 36 verse 24. God says, you've been taken into exile. But here's what I'm going to do. Read what it says. Verse 24. "For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a NEW HEART, and put a NEW SPIRIT IN YOU; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will PUT MY SPIRIT IN YOU and MOVE YOU to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

See how it works? The CHANGE OF HEART... it's going to come because God is going to give them a WHOLE NEW SPIRIT. His OWN SPIRIT. So that THEY LOVE WHAT HE LOVES. So they're actually MOVED to follow his decrees. So that instead of hearts of stone, they've got FLESH HEARTS that are warm and living and beating and loving and all the things they always should have been from the beginning.

And that's the promise. For WHEN ISRAEL TURNS BACK TO HIM... wholeheartedly. So they're not just mucking around. When they get to the point of saying to God, we've GONE A LONG WAY FROM YOU. And we WANT TO COME HOME.

It's HARD BEING SO FAR AWAY. It's HARD living life with a heart of stone. Because we know it should be better than this. When they finally DO THAT as a nation, God's promising... that HIS HOLY SPIRIT... is going to do away with the law written on STONE... and WRITE IT ON THEIR HEARTS INSTEAD.

d) Conclusion

Now because this is part 1 of a series, we're not going any further at this point. Except to say of course that if you've read any of the NEW TESTAMENT, you'll know that THIS STUFF is exactly what it's all about. About THAT PROMISE ... being finally brought about... by JESUS. And the great surprise that people like us, who are not even ISRAELITES... are included in the offer.

And so on exactly the same ground rules, TURNING BACK TO GOD in that same WHOLEHEARTED REPENTANCE... that God's Spirit starts work. Rebuilding you. RIGHT FROM THE HEART.

Which is really very much like COMING HOME. And becoming what you know you SHOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE all the time.

Funny, you know, scientists in South Carolina have used an MRI machine to study people's BRAINS... while they're telling a lie. Sort of like a GIANT SIZED LIE DETECTOR machine. They can watch while different parts of the brain light up when people are LYING or TELLING THE TRUTH.

The funny thing is, it shows LYING IS MUCH HARDER WORK than HONESTY. You need SEVEN BRAIN AREAS working to tell a lie. And only FOUR to tell the truth. Which means in a fundamental way, we're actually originally DESIGNED to be HONEST. And DESIGNED for integrity. And DESIGNED to be loving.

And yet in our human nature we so easily do the opposite. Hearts of stone.

That's what this weekend is about. If you want to know what being SPIRITUAL is about, if you want to know about the WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT... ultimately, God's promise to Israel was that his SPIRIT WOULD CHANGE THEIR HEARTS. That his Spirit would RE-WORK their PERSONALITIES. So they'd LOVE WHAT WAS GOOD. As we know we should.

And the offer stands. Because for anyone who's properly come to FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, that's the sort of LIFECHANGE that follows.

We'll see more in the next session. Not exactly the sort of SPIRITUALITY that sells. No CRYSTALS or MANTRAS. Just that LONG AGO FOUNDATION. God's promise to give his people a NEW HEART. By the work of his Spirit... taking out the heart of stone. Replacing it with a REAL ONE that lives and breathes and loves.

Let's pray.