

Sermon Notes of Elder Larry Omasta's Sermon on January 8, 2017

"It's All about the Heart"

[In today's sermon, "It's All about the Heart", Elder Larry Omasta, shows how God gives us a new, changed heart with the coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives.]

Notes:

Introduction:

- As we're going to see, the heart is one of the key concepts in understanding not only the Bible but also the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.
- It's so interesting that the word "heart" is repeated over and over again throughout both the Old and the New Testaments.

- For example, there are 127 Psalm verses and 75 Proverb verses that talk about the human heart.
- And, when you put together both the major and minor prophetic writings, from Isaiah to Malachi, there are 180 verses that speak about the human heart.
- In fact, the word "heart" occurs 730 times in the OT.

- In the NT, there are approximately 50 times that Jesus talks about our human heart.
- And in the remaining books and letters of the NT, there are over 100 references concerning the human heart.

The human heart:

- So with that many references about the human heart, let's take a look at what God the Father and Jesus Christ have to say about this subject, because it's so vital to our understanding about the changes that take place in us once we accept Jesus as our Savior.

- Now when God inspired the word heart to be used in Scripture, He knew that our heart was more than just a four chamber pump-like organ in our chest.
- Rather God was using the word "heart" to refer to "the totality of humanity's inner being."

- God used the word "heart" 99% of the time in Scripture rather than the word "mind" to describe humanity's feelings and emotions such as anger, joy, and compassion – in other words, the center of a person's inner life.

- Now a lot of critics, both secular and religious, have wondered why God talks about the heart so much and says very little about the human mind.
- They criticize God in their writings by saying: "Doesn't God know that the heart is incapable of thinking and reasoning?"

Scientific research findings:

- Over the past 25-30 years, science has made a lot of important discoveries about the human heart that were never known before.
- Dr. J. Andrew Armour introduced the term, "heart brain," in 1991. Dr. Armour showed that the heart's complex nervous system qualified it as a "little brain."
- The heart brain, like the cranial brain, has an intricate network of neurons and neurotransmitters.
- It can act independently of the cranial brain. The human heart's magnetic field is so powerful that it can even be measured several feet away from the body.
- In fact, our heart rhythms affect the brain's ability to process information.
- The heart has 40,000 sensory neurons involved in relaying information to the brain.
- Scientists have now discovered that the heart sends more information to the brain than the brain sends to the heart.
- What's so amazing is that the heart can send signals to the brain that can not only influence our perceptions, and trigger emotional experiences, but also help the brain to be creative and innovative.
- One last and very astonishing piece of medical research information is the fact that "In fetal development, the heart forms and starts beating before the brain begins to develop."
- So, the bottom line is that God, as our Creator, knew the true nature of the human heart and how complex it is because He created it that way. So then He inspired the writers of the Bible to talk about the heart and its impact and influence on how we live our lives.

Heart – Old Testament word:

- Now the main Hebrew word for heart in the OT contains two Hebrew letters pronounced L and V.
- In the Hebrew language each letter also has a meaning. The letter L means "to learn."
- And the letter V means "God's word" or "God's dwelling place."
- And so putting those two letters together, the Hebrew word translated heart means not only "the central body organ" but also "the innermost or hidden part of anything" which describes the role of the heart.
- And in Ezekiel, God tells us that he is going to give us a new heart whereby, we will truly be able to know and relate to Him – to learn (L) God's word (V).

Proverbs:

- Now the book of Proverbs kind of summarizes the reality of what goes on in our human hearts – the good, the bad and the ugly.
- First, let's look at the good inclinations: the heart is the seat of wisdom (2:10); and trust or confidence (3:5); the heart gives us diligence (4:23) and perseverance (6:14);

understanding (8:5); sorrow (14:13); cheerfulness (15:13); knowledge (15:14) and joy (15:30)

- Now let's look at the bad and the ugly. The heart is the seat of wicked imaginations (6:18); lust (6:25); deceit (12:20); folly (12:23); bitterness (14:10); backsliding (14:14); pride (16:5); haughtiness (18:12); and envy (23:17).
- In the OT, God was very much concerned about the nature of mankind's heart. He told the prophet Jeremiah this amazing statement:

Jer. 17:9 (NKJ), The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

(NLT) The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?

- The short answer to that question is that God does.
- That's why God also promised that He would give Israel, including all people, a new heart in the not too distant future so they would be able to follow Him and His ways.

Ezek. 36:26, (NIV) 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.

- And we will see that the ministry of Jesus Christ fulfilled God's promise to do this.

Heart – New Testament word:

- Now, the Greek word for heart is "*kardia*" which has a wide variety of meanings.
- First of all, it means the physical organ.
- Secondly, the heart is also the source of human emotions including intellect, will, anger, passion, joy, etc.
- And finally, *kardia* also has a figurative meaning "the center or core of anything."

What does Jesus tell us?

- Now let's look at what Jesus tells us about the human heart.
- First, He confirms what the OT teaches about the human heart that it is, indeed, deceitful and wicked, in spite of the good we desire to do.
- After a confrontation with Pharisees and teachers of the law who condemned Jesus and His disciples for not obeying their religious traditions, Jesus tells His disciples and all of us in

Mark 7:20 (NIV), "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. 21) For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come – sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22) adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23) All these evils come from inside and defile a person."

- What Jesus is affirming here is that every outward act of horrible sins is first preceded by sinful thoughts.

- And earlier in His ministry, one of the shocking principles that Jesus taught in the “Sermon on the Mount” was that even if you didn’t actually commit the outward act of murder or adultery, but have hatred or lustful thoughts in your heart, you are still guilty of the sin of murder or adultery!!
- Jesus shows us that the thoughts of our heart are very, very powerful and corrupt us.

A new heart coming:

- But thankfully, also as an important part of His ministry, Jesus came to show us how humans are going to receive a “new heart and changed” from God that Ezekiel was inspired to write about.
- In a meeting with the Pharisee Nicodemus, who was also a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious ruling council, Jesus first talked about how God was going to change human hearts through the Holy Spirit.

John 3:2, He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” 3) Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again, or born from above.”

- The Greek word “anothen” which modifies the verb ‘born’, has three different meanings.
 - 1) It can mean “from the beginning – totally anew.”
 - 2) It can mean again in the sense of for the second time.
 - 3) And it can mean from above, and, therefore, from God.
- Now, it’s impossible for us to get all these meanings into any one English word. Yet all three meanings describe the phrase “born again.”
- This whole process that Jesus has introduced here is not initiated by human achievement, because it comes from the grace and power of God.
- To be born anew and from above is to undergo such a radical change that it is like a new birth.
- And so Nicodemus only understood the phrase, “born again or born anew”, in a basic literal way.
- So he asked this question:

4) “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

5) Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6) Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7) You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You [plural word in the Greek] must be born again.’

- Nicodemus could only imagine a second birth that would be physical, so Jesus put the emphasis once again on the fact that the new birth is from above and is not physical but rather it’s the work of the Spirit.
- If all we have is a physical birth, we are truly limited to what the flesh can do.

- Through the flesh we really can't have a meaningful relationship with God. We are so far distant from God!
- But our second birth, by the Spirit, makes it possible to have in a deep and intimate relationship with our Creator Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, which is so important.

Rivers of living water:

- Later in Jesus' ministry, when He attended the fall festival in Jerusalem, Jesus talked more about the coming of the Holy Spirit and how the Spirit would change men's hearts.

John 7:38 (NLT), Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will then flow from his heart.'" 39) (When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.)

- The key to what Jesus is saying here, the Spirit would be given to those who believe in or have faith in Him as the Messiah or Savior.
- Now the apostle John, in his introduction to his gospel, wrote these amazing statements.

John 1:12 (NLT), But to all who believed Jesus and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. 13) They are reborn – not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

- John tells us that when we accept and believe in Jesus as our Savior, we will undergo a spiritual rebirth of the heart and then become the children of God.

The promise of the Holy Spirit:

- Now after the last meal Jesus had with His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion, He emphasized to them about how this spiritual rebirth of the heart would come.
- It would occur with the coming of the Advocate, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit and what a difference He would make in their lives.

John 14:16, (NLT) And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. 17) He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth.

- And then Jesus ties it all together by saying in verse 27,
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27) (NLT) "I am leaving you with a gift – peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."

- How did Jesus leave them with "peace of mind and heart"?
- He did that through the Holy Spirit who would come to His believers on the Day of Pentecost.
- The Holy Spirit transforms both mind and heart by giving God's peace.

The Apostle Paul:

- So now let's go to the New Testament letters.
- We need to be very thankful to the apostle Paul who wrote many segments of his letters concerning this transformation of the heart.
- And the reason Paul could give all of us a clear understanding about this is because of what he, himself, had experienced.
- First of all, Saul/Paul was an aggressive persecutor of believers in Jesus.
- He was in charge of the martyrdom of Stephen by the Jewish religious leaders.
- He was instrumental at imprisoning Christians in Jerusalem and bringing believers of Jesus back to Palestine who had fled the area for their safety.
- In fact, Saul was a mission going to Damascus to capture and expedite Christians back to Jerusalem.
- We'll pick up the story in Acts 9.

Acts 9:1, Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2) and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3) As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4) He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

5) "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6) "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

8) Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9) For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

- Saul, who we would call a reprobate, was challenged by the glorified resurrected Jesus and was blinded by Him for three days.
- And after Jesus had confronted Saul with His great love and concern for him, Saul yielded himself to accept Jesus and received the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Saul not only had his name changed to Paul, but his heart was incredibly transformed by the Holy Spirit from being a hater and persecutor of Christians to become a faithful and bold evangelist preaching Jesus to as many Gentiles as he could reach.
- And so because Paul had gone through a very miraculous change of heart, he was able to share this dramatic insight with others.
- Let's look at a couple of verses in Romans where Paul shows us how God has changed our hearts.

Changed hearts:

Romans 2:29 (NLT), No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart

produced by the Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.

- God, in essence, gives us a new heart, as He prophesied He would, by having the Holy Spirit indwell in our hearts.
- The HS completely changes our thinking and motivations as to why we do things.

Romans 5:5 (NLT), For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us (poured out – Greek) the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his (God’s) love.

- It’s the “love of God” that is poured out to fill our hearts, which is so different than our self-centered love.
- And when God gives us His love, through the Holy Spirit, we begin to exhibit Godly characteristics that are so different than what we used to do.
- Paul gives us specific examples about how God’s love transforms our heart-felt thoughts and actions in 1 Cor. 13.

1 Cor. 13:4 (NLT), Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud 5) or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. 6) It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. 7) Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

- Wow, these Godly characteristics are truly amazing!
- And when we exhibit those Godly attitudes and actions, we are truly amazed what God can accomplish through us.
- And in Galatians, Paul contrasts the ugly “acts of the flesh” with the beautiful love of God in our lives, which here he calls the “fruit of the Spirit.”

Gal. 5:16 (NLT), So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves. 17) The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires.

22) But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23) gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

- It was Paul’s experience that when he and others accepted Jesus into their lives, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit occurred.
- And the Holy Spirit changes the desires of our hearts and we begin to live a new and different life filled with God’s love.

Concluding comments:

- So as we’ve seen this morning, it’s really all about the heart.
- God inspired the writers to use the word heart very frequently in both the Old and New Testaments in a psychological sense, as the center or focus of mankind’s Inner personal life.

- And within the last 25-30 years, science has shown us the formerly unknown amazing characteristics of the heart where it has 40,000 sensory neurons involved in relaying information to the brain.
- In fact, the heart sends more information to the brain than the brain sends to the heart.
- As we showed earlier, scientific study has learned that the heart can send signals to the brain that can not only influence our perceptions, and trigger emotional experiences, but also help the brain to be creative and innovative.
- So, the heart truly is the source of our motives, the seat of our passions, and the center of our thought processes.
- And God fulfilled His promise of giving us a new heart that would be like His.

Helping people:

- So, hopefully we can share some of this information when we talk to people.
- When we treat people with love and respect, it's amazing how comfortable they become with us.
- And when this happens they will often share with us what's going on in their lives – even about some of their frustrations.
- For example, someone might say, “I wish I could change my ways of thinking.”
- Or tell you, “I want to change how I react under stressful conditions, but I don't know how.”
- Or, “My heart is heavy and burdened down with all the dumb habits and attitudes that I have which not only hurt me but also even hurt my relations with others. What can I do?”
- If people share some of these kinds of thoughts with us, we can respond by telling them about the transformation that is taking place in our lives because of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.
- We can tell them if they put their trust in Jesus and turn their life over to Him, He will make them a new person too.
- That's what Jesus is all about.
- I'm certain many of you have interesting stories about your life has been transformed and changed by Jesus living His life in you through the Holy Spirit. I know I do.
- As part of our answer to others, we could paraphrase what Jesus said about coming to Him for rest in Matthew 11.

Matt. 11:28 (NLT), Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29) Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

- Yes, all of our lives are greatly influenced by the thoughts and passions of our hearts.
- And Jesus came to this earth to give us rest by changing our hearts and make us a new person from the inside out by sending the Holy Spirit – something that we could never do ourselves, no matter how hard we try.
- Yes, it's all about the heart and how Jesus changes it!

Closing Prayer