



Mercy forever.

## Lenten Sermon Three

### The Spirit Anointed Christ for Mercy – Lenten Worship Series

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*Based on Luke 4:18–19*

*The Spirit Anointed Christ . . . to Heal the Broken Hearted*

Hearts can be hard, cold, happy, and cruel. They can be hunters, dark and captive. They can be achy and breaky. Jesus said He came to heal the broken hearted. But what is the heart? We can't be talking about the organ that pumps blood throughout the body because once that's broken even the best heart surgeon can't fix it. The human heart can be transplanted, but once broken it's done. God talks about transplanting our hard hearts of stone and replacing them with a heart of flesh, making us His people. So what is the heart—the way the Bible would have us understand it?

The word of greatest importance in describing the human being is the biblical word *heart*. If you go to concordances in the Bible *heart* shows up over 1,000 times and is much more common than the term *soul*. The heart presented in Scriptures is the indispensable center of human life. Feelings, desires, and emotions are connected with the heart (Ps. 21:2; John 16:6, 22). The conscience bears witness to the Law written on the heart (Rom. 2:15).<sup>1</sup> Paul says in Romans 10 “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we preach); in chapter 9, that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; and again in chapter 10, for with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Ian Hamer said that the heart is the religious center that brings together the whole of a person's life. It is the heart in which men encounter God, either to rebel in hate (Ps. 14:1) or to embrace with grateful love (Luke 2:51).

The heart, in this Scriptural sense, is not to be pictured as one part or one element in man. The heart is the person, and the many functions and activities by which we come to know a person are expression of the heart. Other expressions of the person are: man is a social being, biological being, neurological, political, economic, and so on. But these are just aspects of his person, expressions of the fact that man is fundamentally a religious, God-related being.<sup>2</sup>

So when we think of Jesus healing a broken heart, we think of Jesus healing an entire person. We also think of Him healing the spirit of a person, that part that connects with God. Life of the spirit is the foundation stone of our human identity and integrates all other aspects of our personhood in the purpose of living. If the spirit, the heart, is away from God, it is bound to have consequences on a person's character as well as his or her health. Jesus confirmed the truth of this process when He said, “If then the light within you is darkness how great is that darkness” (Matt. 6:23).<sup>3</sup>

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1 Garth Ludwig, “Order Restored” (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 138.

2 Ian Hammer, “Pastor, The Gene Made Me Do It,” *Concordia Journal*, 1997, 23(1).

3 Ludwig op cit.

One author has talked about how God anointed Christ as Prophet to preach at least five messages: forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God; the destruction of the devil's power and freedom from bondage; treating others with compassion as the loved creation of God; inviting those freed to become God's new people; and changing hearts of stone to hearts of flesh.

That last comes from the Old Testament, which looked forward to the end of exile and the coming of the Messiah. "It 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" (Ezek. 36:26). "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Jer. 31:33). Jesus came to change hearts of stone to hearts of flesh. This became a recurring theme in His teaching. The heart was "the inner life, the center of the personality and the place where God reveals himself." Jesus used this term almost 50 times in the Gospels. People were in need of a heart transplant, as their hearts were spiritually dead. This call for spiritual transformation came as both a warning and an invitation.

How does spiritual formation take place in His followers? Throughout the Gospels, Jesus seems to encourage them to develop three types of hearts (with His help). The first is a heart of mercy: "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice'" (Matt. 9:13). The second is a heart of love: "A new command I give: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). The third is a heart of faith: "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel" (Luke 7:9).<sup>4</sup>

So Jesus came to change hearts; but what if the heart is broken? How do hearts get broken? They get broken when the Law is preached and they understand there is nothing they have done or can do to get themselves into a right relationship with God. Hearts get broken when circumstances get them into a position in which their relationship with God and others is broken.

*[Illustration (please feel free to add your own illustration here.)*

*Almost a decade ago, the town of Grand Forks, N.D., was completely flooded and almost all of the town's population was evacuated. I was there when people from LCMS World Relief and Human Care came in with help and hope. But there were broken hearts. When monetary gifts from our brothers and sisters in Christ were distributed, I was there to watch a ministry of presence. But I also saw broken hearts.*

*Think about this with me. One person from LCMS World Relief and Human Care said to the pastors who were present, "You won't be here in five years." It sounded strange in the midst of the chaos we were experiencing, but as I have thought about the statement over the years, it needed to be said. Here is why. Let's just focus on the pastors in that audience. They too had lost their homes. They didn't know where their parishioners went.*

*They didn't know how to reach them. They didn't know how to minister to people they could not find. They were angry and upset at their own loss and angry and upset over the loss of the people entrusted to their care. They wondered how to get the mud, the crud, and the garbage out of their homes as well as their churches. They wondered and worried about the sheep of their sheepfold. All of this was going on with the pressure of taking care of their families and children. Who do you get angry with? Anger is an emotion that we all feel, so think of this.*

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4 David Olson, "The American Church In Crisis," (Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderan, 2008), 196.

*They were angry at themselves for being unable to fix the situation. They were angry at their people for not being where they were supposed to be. They were angry at themselves for believing that their parishioners should be where they could reach them; and most frightening of all, they are angry at God for letting, allowing, causing—whatever words you want to use—all of this to happen. How do you cope with that? How do you tell hurting people that you are angry at them for getting on emergency vehicles and being transported from the mud, the crud, and the water while you stayed behind to help? Help who? Everyone is gone! How do you explain to the people you love that when they left, through no fault of their own, they left you? How do tell them that this is their church that they have abandoned, a church that was here long before you came and will be here long after you are gone? They called you here and you answered, and now they are gone! You came here for them; and you came here for God—and now all has been washed away. How do you explain that you are angry at the very God who’s Word you have been called by them to proclaim? How? Does it sound crazy to you? This may help you understand a broken heart. It’s in the DNA of these pastors to help. And yet, in this situation, they are helpless. They have, in their DNA, a need to provide comfort; and there is no one to comfort. They feel alone, abandoned, and worthless. They are angry, and their hearts are broken. They have spent, most of them at least, their entire adult life preaching of a God of love and mercy. Now they feel abandoned and helpless, and there is no one to blame but the God who called them into the ministry—a ministry they cannot carry out. They are mad at God for letting this happen, and they are mad at their people for not being there to be ministered to. It sounds crazy, but it is human.*

*The heart, the “the inner life, the center of the personality, and the place where God reveals himself” has been broken, and now the God of peace that they proclaim has turned into the God of disaster. Their hearts are broken. And guess what—in five years none of the pastors who were at that meeting were in Grand Forks any longer. They had moved on, and I pray they moved on to productive ministries elsewhere.]*

I think of those pastors often, and I think of their feeling of utter abandonment. They trusted in the God of love and awful things happened. When they wanted to minister to people in the midst of trial and tribulation, everyone was gone. Then I think of the merciful Christ hanging upon a cross and crying out with a loud voice, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” Jesus, the merciful anointed one of God who paid for the sins of the whole world, felt abandoned, too. His heart was broken for us.

The anointed merciful one who came to give us the mercy of God felt that mercy was gone. How do we deal with that? In “Christ Have Mercy—How to Put Your Faith in Action,” Rev. Matthew Harrison writes about the aftermath of another great flood, the 2004 Asian tsunami:

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to suffer and to die for us. Although risen, He remains the “crucified one” (see 1 Corinthians 2:2). What does that fact mean in the aftermath of a tsunami (any disaster)? I do not know the hidden will of God. However, I do know His revealed will in Holy Scripture. From the cross, God worked his most profound deed—the salvation of all sinners. Jesus’ suffering is salvation. His suffering is mercy. God works through and is revealed in suffering. I plunge my feeble and sinful thoughts into Christ’s suffering, where I learn that amid trials and crosses, disaster upon disaster, God loves us in Christ. And there, only there, do I find consolation amid the devastation. Faith knows that resurrection follows Good Friday.

The women stood at a distance and watched Jesus die—the situation appeared hopeless (Mark

15:40). This looked to be the end. Perhaps the women thought, “God hates this Jesus and us,” or maybe even, “There is no God—or certainly no god who cares about us.” Yet right there, on Good Friday, God the Father was doing what He had prepared to do from all eternity for the salvation of the world. The apex of God’s love acting in history was veiled and hidden by a bloody, wretched body on the cross.

Where was God in the tsunami? Where He always is—in Christ, in suffering, in the cross. Why did God not prevent the death and destruction? That question merely reveals our selfish desire to be God and demand that He reveal more than what He wills. There is no Elijah or Jeremiah to prophesy to us concerning the reasons. We have a better line of communication: “In these last days He has spoken to us by His Son” (Hebrews 1:2). What I do know I know because God has revealed it to me in Christ and in His word: “God so loved the world” (John 3:16). Luther writes that “we must take hold of this God, not naked but clothed and revealed in His Word; otherwise certain despair will crush us.” The (disasters) tsunamis of life drive us to confess, “Truly this man was the Son of God! (Mark 15:39).<sup>5</sup>

Where is God when our hearts are broken? Healing them through His anointed one, Jesus the Christ—the anointed Prophet, Priest, and King who wants to heal us and wants us to care for the broken hearted by His power and love in our ministry of presence and speaking mercy and gifts of love. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew Harrison, “Christ Have Mercy—How To Put Your Faith in Action,” (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 127.