

“Building a Heart”

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#1 in a Series of 6

Text: Matthew 5:1-12



and did not have the time. Then we had new members class on Sunday afternoon and then I was in a two hour worship service Sunday night at another church and when I got home I was too tired to even hold my head up. Monday morning I woke up early feeling sick and very poor in my spirit. I cursed my promise to these Baptists and I wondered why on earth a bunch of Southern Baptists would want to hear anything from a Presbyterian anyway. And, I considered cancelling. That big yellow couch down in the basement sounded so good.

I could not start writing until the car ride and I scratched out a few notes on a piece of paper, but it wasn't very good. We got where we were going a little early. It was a gorgeous day and I sat outside on a bench. And I prayed "Lord, I don't know how I got into this mess. I don't want to be here. And if anything is going to happen today, your Holy Spirit is going to have to do it." And then I folded my arms and waited...and waited...and waited. Nothing happened. There were no lightning strikes. No thunder bolts. I knew what I had was not very good or particularly interesting. And there was, to make matters worse, an hour and 15 minutes of it.

At 6:25 PM, I was writing my first notes on the board. And I was even bored looking at it. I was far off the couch — way out of my comfort zone. Then suddenly, from nowhere a flash of insight came to me. In fact I scribbled a few notes on a different page. And at 6:30, I started teaching! And it was actually not too bad. In fact, I am sure I will use what I taught as part of a sermon series here. And the Baptists really liked it. The hour and 15 minutes flew by and you could feel the Holy Spirit in the room.

I say this not to boast about me...but to boast about Jesus and to say that if you are poor in Spirit this morning you are blessed, because you are ready to ask the Holy Spirit to give you a new heart and watch Jesus build His kingdom through you.

Some of this information is drawn from a *Sports Illustrated* article by Kansas Citian Joe Posnanski entitled "Zach Greinke is in Total Control" published April 28, 2009.

Geia Kjetsa, *Fyodor Dostoyevsky: A Writers' Life* tr: Sir Hustevdt and David McDuff (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1989) p.107.

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If you are poor in Spirit this morning — you're blessed. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a new heart and watch Jesus build His kingdom through you. Let us pray.

Lord God, through your Son Jesus Christ, you have given us a new heart. Help us to listen to you out of that heart. Help us to be further transformed this morning so that you, through us, may bend the world around us to the shape of your Kingdom. We ask all this in the name of Jesus Christ and by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

We have a couch in our basement. It's a big, fluffy, yellow couch, you can literally sink into it. I bought it about eleven years ago precisely because it was so big and comfortable. When I get on that couch, in front of our HDTV with surround sound, a drink and something to munch on, I am in my comfort zone. The concerns of the world just sort of melt away. I have eaten everything on that couch from Christmas Ham to Fourth of July Bratwursts. I have watched football (lots and lots of football), basketball, baseball, golf, hundreds of movies, and spent probably a month or two of my life in naps on that couch. When I am sick, I would much rather lay on that big yellow couch than in my bed. There is almost nothing I would rather do on a Friday night than snuggle with my wife and watch a great action movie while eating pizza. I call that the Triple Crown. The big yellow couch is my physical comfort zone.

Somehow, we have gotten the idea that faith in Jesus is a comfort zone phenomenon; that faith in Jesus is the equivalent of eating pizza and watching movies on the couch. Jesus is passionately committed to pulling us from our comfort zone. He is unswervingly determined to get us up off the couch — even if He has to yank us. Faith in Jesus is about movement. Faith in Jesus is about being someone one day and someone better the next as the world around us bends to the shape of the Kingdom of God. A comfort zone is a sweet place to visit but you wouldn't want to live there.

There may be no better example of this movement than the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew tells us that as Jesus began teaching and healing, his fame spread like wildfire — through Galilee and Syria. Huge crowds followed Him everywhere. And they brought to him, Matthew teaches, **“all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, and those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.” (Matthew 4: 24)** And while these huge crowds of the sick and the needy and the hurting followed Him, He went up on a mountain and He gave a sermon. I have found that a sermon is a good

way to drive people away, but maybe Jesus knew something I don't.

His Sermon on the Mount is the most famous and well-regarded speech in history. Thomas Jefferson, who did not believe Jesus was God, called the Sermon on the Mount "My religion." Gandhi said that if he only had to adopt the Sermon the Mount then he would not hesitate to say, "Oh yes, I am a Christian." Harry Truman said, "[I do not believe there is a problem in this country or the world today which could not be settled if approached through the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.](#)"

Let me be perfectly frank with you. I am not sure what makes the Sermon on the Mount so popular. It's hard teaching — maybe the hardest, most difficult to follow teaching in all the Bible. People have made their lives uncomfortable attempting to follow Jesus' 80 different imperatives in it. There are lot of other places in God's Word where you get comfort and grace and mercy and rainbows and gentle breezes, even doe-eyed love stories and incredible, undeniable, unfathomable assurances of God's unswerving love and care. I would much rather spend thinking and praying on that kind of thing because this is what Christ teaches in the Sermon on the Mount: "Get off the couch and build My Kingdom!"

The first stanza of this sermon you may know as the Beatitudes; from the Latin word meaning blessed. There are nine Beatitudes. The beatitudes begin with someone being in a poor and wretched state and end with that person being used as instrument of Jesus Christ in the world—so great an instrument that this sinful world takes notice and tries to shut them down. Faith in Jesus is about motion. It is about being someone one day and someone better the next and the world around us bends to the shape of the Kingdom of God.

If you are poor in spirit this morning —maybe that is your comfort zone—do not believe the lie which says that is where God wants you to be. Jesus Christ has promised you His kingdom. **(Matthew 5:3)**

And if you believe that...if you can take that little baby step of faith. You are blessed. Because the next step of faith is to not exist in permanent state of being poor in spirit — but a temporary state of mourning. You are blessed too. Blessed are those who mourn, Jesus taught — you shall be comforted. **(Matthew 5:4)**

And if you believe you will be comforted, you are blessed. Because in your faith, if you can manage to remain humble and meek, you will inherit the earth **(Matthew 5:5)**. For the Word teaches that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

And with the assurance that by God's grace you will inherit the earth, you are blessed, because you are now freed to forget about your needs and your desires and you can focus your attention upon what Jesus wants for His kingdom. And now you hunger and thirst to see this world made right, you desire righteousness. And Jesus' promise is that you will be satisfied. **(Matthew 5:6)**

viction. Dostoevsky was arrested, plucked right from his comfort zone — far from his comfort zone. He was put in prison in Siberia, in a place he called the House of the Dead. But it was in this "House of the Dead" that Dostoevsky received a new heart. He saw prisoners with nothing, no chance to ever live free again, pray to God. Thank God. Treat each other as human beings. Just after he was released, he wrote these words in a letter to a friend:

I believe that nothing is more beautiful, profound, sympathetic, reasonable, brave and perfect than Christ. With a jealous love, I say to myself, not only that his equal cannot be found, but that it does not exist. And more, if someone should bring me proof that Christ is outside the truth, then I should prefer to remain with Christ than with the truth.

But what if I am not Zack Greinke? What if I am not Dostoevsky? What if I am poor in spirit and the Kingdom of Heaven seems so far away that I would need the Hubble Telescope to see it. The only sure cure for a poor spirit is the Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

I see the Holy Spirit putting in new hearts at the Presbyterian Church of Stanley every day. That is the purpose of these Discipleship Groups — to hone our hearts so that we may build Christ's Kingdom. Let's go back to the drawing. How do we, imperfect people, hone our heart? How do we, of whom Scripture says, "have no health in our bones because of our sin" make ourselves healthy? We need the Holy Spirit. Quite simply, when we allow Him into our heart, He moves us. We are someone one day and someone better the next and the world around us bends to the shape of the Kingdom of God.

Galatians 5 teaches that those who are led and live by the Holy Spirit will inherit the Kingdom of God and then it goes on the mention nine fruits of the Holy Spirit—peace, love, joy, goodness, kindness, patience, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. There are nine beatitudes to match them. A coincidence? Maybe, if you believe in that sort of thing.

But we cannot be led by the Holy Spirit until we admit our poverty of spirit and ask the Holy Spirit to take us out of our comfort zone. Until we in essence say, Holy Spirit lead me — because I am simply stretched beyond what I am able.

This happened to me Monday. About a month ago I committed to teach a group of 30 Southern Baptist pastors. They wanted me to teach for an hour and 15 minutes. My plan had been to spend most of the week, two weeks ago, working on it. Turns out I had to preach two weeks ago

evidence.

If you could take a picture of your heart — what would it look like? I don't mean the physical, blood-pumping, four-chambered muscle. I mean the inner being, the conscience. The Hebrew word for "heart" is *leb* and the best meaning of it is "the seat of the appetites and the emotions." Biblically speaking, the heart is what drives and motivates us.

Scripture teaches that we already have one, crystal clear, living color, high-definition picture of our heart: our life. Our life is the picture of our heart.

What kind of relationships do we have? Is our life filled with anger, apathy, fear, anxiety, and lust? Are we generous? Do we choose our words carefully or do we use them as weapons? Do we speak truthfully? Are we generous or stingy? Do we trust Jesus to provide for our life or do we live in fear? Do we step over the needy or extend a hand? Do we attempt to build ourselves up by tearing others down? Or do we know that our self-worth is God's gift of grace? Do we do unto others as we have done to us or do we do to others before they do unto us? Do we serve God or mammon? How we answer gives us a pretty clear picture of the condition of our heart.

The heart is the tool which Jesus uses to build His Kingdom on earth. This world takes on the shape of our heart. If we want to know what all of our hearts look like — look at the world around us. Imagine two circles, concentric, one around the other. The first circle, the inner circle determines the shape of the one around it. If it is round, the one outside it will be round as well. But if the inner circle is misshapen, malformed the outer circle will be too. Whether we build Jesus' kingdom or we build something perishable, depends upon the condition of our heart.

But is a new heart even possible? Can God, will God, even in His amazing grace, do such a thing?

Today is the last day of the major league baseball regular season. It is for the 24th consecutive year without postseason for the Royals. One overzealous, starry-eyed Pastor in his front-page newsletter article predicted that they would end up with an 87-75 record this year. There is one bright spot — however. Zack Greinke. Zack has been the best pitcher in baseball this year and, at least until the seventh inning yesterday, the front-runner for the Cy Young Award. Three years ago, it was a question if he would ever pitch again. He left baseball for a little while the following year. He talked about giving up. He thought he might play pro golf. Every day seemed gray. Every time he stepped out on the pitching mound, he was out of his comfort zone. But something changed for Zack. The talent has never been in question. But his heart is different.

The Russian writer Dostoevsky had anything but a strong faith as a young man. He was a radical, a utopian socialist. His faith in the Russian Orthodox Church, was one of convenience and comfort rather than con-

And now satiated with Christ's righteousness, you are blessed. For now convinced that God is making this world right, you can extend mercy to those who so desperately need it. And Jesus' promise is that if you do, you too will receive mercy. **(Matthew 5:7)**

And now, receiving Jesus' mercy, you are blessed, because knowing mercy and grace, you can, for the first time, see God. **(Matthew 5:8)**

And now being able to see God, if can allow the Holy Spirit to lead you that far, you are blessed. Because seeing God and knowing Him as you now do, you have a picture of what is to come and so you seek to build heaven on earth and so work for peace in your life and others.

(Matthew 5:9)

And because you are now a peacemaker, you are blessed, because the world now sees you as you truly are — a son, a daughter of God doing His work on the earth, expanding His kingdom. **(Matthew 5:10)**

And because the world now sees you as a son or daughter of God seeking to establish His Kingdom, you are blessed. The sinful world now sees you as a threat and you are persecuted, tortured, and tyrannized — but in that oppression, God's plan for you becomes so clear and His loving, abiding presence grows so near, and you can almost reach out and touch the Kingdom of Heaven. **(Matthew 5:11)**

And if you can almost reach out and touch the Kingdom of Heaven, you are blessed because you are not the first son or daughter of God whom this sinful and broken world has oppressed and suppressed and distressed, and so you will be rewarded by your Father in Heaven who sees all and you will be numbered with those who have stood unflinchingly for His grace and love and truth, who have charged the fiery gates of Hell with a squirt gun, who by the sheer force of their heart have bent the world around them to the shape of the Christ's Kingdom. **(Matthew 5:12)**

Of course this kind of amazing transformation from a 98 pound spiritual weakling to the faithful equivalent of Andre the Giant, strains credulity, to say the least. But this is what Jesus promises. How does He do it?

He does it by changing our heart.

But how do I even know what my heart looks like?

When I was 25, I blew out my right knee out playing basketball. I will never forget going for an MRI on it and the doctor holding up the picture and pointing out with his pen that I had completely torn two of the three ligaments and I had a partial tear of the third. He also pointed out with his pen where there was some cartilage damage and a couple of broken bones. He just kept going on and on. Up to this point I had doubted if I needed surgery, but the MRI removed all doubt about dreadful condition of my right knee and the need for radical steps. On a happier note, the experience of going in for the first ultrasound for both our sons — Calvin and Harold, made the whole thing seem so real. No longer would I just have to take Jen's word that she was pregnant, now I had photographic