

Repent and believe

April 6, 2008

Acts 2: 14a, 36-41

Jesus is alive. Our joy is from the heart.

Those who heard Peter preach were cut to the heart.

The men walking on the road to Emmaus said “our hearts were burning within us when he talked to us, while he was opening the scriptures to us. Our eyes were opened when we ate with him.”

We talk about the heart.

My heart just isn't in it. Is your heart in the right place? We are talking about motivation.

Scrooge needed a change of heart. We mean his attitude about life and people.

“Have a heart” means get some compassion.

He has a lot of heart. Courage

The heart of the matter is the real meaning.

A matter of the heart is about feelings.

The Bible refers to this as being saved, as being born again, as becoming a new creature. To believe the gospel means inviting Christ to come and live in our hearts. He promises he will.

Now how can that be? How can one person live inside another person? It is a matter of the spirit. Our spirit is the place where our feelings are, the place of our attitudes, our confidence and self respect, our appreciation of beauty, our love. We call it our heart. The place where my compassion lives, my outlook on life. The spirit of Jesus, called the Holy Spirit, will come to live there. It will transform our feelings, our attitudes our self respect, our appreciation of the world, our love. He will transform us from the inside out.

What happens?

Forgiveness of sins. When we disobey God and go our way instead of God's way, we hurt ourselves, God and others. When we accept Christ as Lord and Savior God takes away the sin. We don't have to carry around the guilt anymore for the trouble we've caused ourselves, God and others.

Live with God forever in heaven. A place where we will know completely and be known completely. A place where unconditional love governs every action, every relationship.

Opened up to a much bigger life than the life we can get any other way. God will give us a compassion for people we can not work up in ourselves. God will answer questions we can't find anywhere else. God will give us a purpose for our life we can't make up ourselves. God will steer us toward the right decisions: the right spouse, the right career,

the most exciting things to learn. God will keep us from judging people unfairly, seeing things from their point of view. The Bible calls it the abundant life.

Coming to Jesus is like coming home. Home to one who knows me better than I know myself. Who loves me with all my weaknesses. Who loves me enough to use my abilities without having to make me into someone else. Who has the power to stand against corruption when I need it. Who has the power to forgive unlovely and cruel people when I need it. Who has the people with the money, the wisdom, the encouragement for ministry when mine runs out. The master who can match me with the right job.

Those who heard Peter preach were “cut to the heart”. Now there is such a thing as heart surgery. The Dr. can cut to your physical heart. When the arteries get blocked and the oxygen can’t get to your body, you are tired and weak. You need to be cut to the heart. Then when the arteries are opened or bypassed and the blood flows, you feel like a new person, with fresh energy.

And when we repent and believe the gospel, and Christ comes into our spiritual heart, we become new. The great relief of freedom from sin, from not needing to be good to win God’s approval, from not needing to be right, that great relief is like fresh oxygen getting to our attitudes, our compassion, our self respect, our love. And for many of us, we get emotional. We act from the heart in hallelujah, in songs, in tears, in clapping hands. We let it out.

We had a healing service here 5 weeks ago where many showed their emotions. Several told me how refreshing it was to be able to express their faith emotionally in response to prayer and healing. Others said their temperament and background meant this kind of emotional expression was still foreign to them. They didn’t see it as negative, just good for others rather than themselves.

One woman told me that night that she had received a word of another woman being healed. That second woman came to me later and told me of healing for her arthritis. Another woman who found healing for her back pain at the altar that night was one who had ministered healing to a friend in our church who brought her. Letting our feelings out is the best way to respond to that. We get emotional. That’s fine.

For some, emotional faith is the only right kind of faith. If I don’t feel it, it isn’t real. But feeling religion is only a part of healthy faith. There is also the thinking part and the doing part. Heart religion, head religion and hand religion are all part of healthy religion. Feeling faith alone is narrow and meager.

But feeling faith is an important part of it. So “rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” as Paul reminds us to do.

Jesus showed his feelings when he drove the money changers out of the temple. It was righteous indignation over the way people were taking advantage of the poor and robbing

people of the true meaning of sacrifice in worship. His passion showed. Memphis was in the news this weekend. Yesterday the Memphis University won its basketball game and fans were expressing their joy. Friday was the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis. There's an example of passion and righteous indignation because of faith in Christ. He knew his life was in danger, but he said "I just want to do God's will." There's a time to let your passion show.

My son God a job last week. I felt relieved and glad for him. My aunt died last week. I had tears yesterday at her funeral, but I saw much joy there too.

Jesus showed his feelings when he wept over Jerusalem. They wouldn't listen, and he wept in frustration and sorrow for them. Jesus wept when his friend Lazarus died.

What do you get excited about? How do you use your passion? Is it for something that doesn't last like a basketball game? Or is for something that does last, like your relationship to God?

Give your heart to Jesus. Only he can set it right. Only he can refine your attitudes, your self confidence, your compassion, your appreciation of his world. Only he can bring true forgiveness and direction for your life. Repent and believe the gospel, and you will be cut to the heart, and it will be made new.

Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Jer 31: 33-4