

THE HEART OF MAN

Part 1

I would like to discuss something that is very dear to me, and the understanding of which radically changed my own life. It is something that the Lord revealed to me in Zimbabwe and that I taught weekly for about six months in the Dutch Reformed Church where I was a minister. The more I preached about it, the more the message began to change my own life. This message concerns the HEART-condition of mankind, and what the Bible has to say about it.

Let us begin in Matthew chapter 15. Jesus is speaking here, and He says,

Matt 15:8 "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me."

The preceding verse says,

*Matt 15:7 "You hypocrites, rightly did **Isaiah** prophesy of you, saying ..."*

Jesus refers to Isaiah

Let's take a look at what Isaiah had to say about this. We read about it in Isaiah chapter 1.

Isa 1:11 "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" says YHWH. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed cattle. And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats.'

1:12 *"When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts?"*

1:13 *"Bring your **worthless** (the Afrikaans translation uses the word 'skynheilige', meaning hypocritical) offerings no longer, incense is an **abomination** to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies – I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly.*

1:14 *"I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts (remember it is **YHWH** who is speaking here), they have become a burden to Me. I am weary of bearing them.*

1:15 *"So when you spread out your hands **in prayer**, I will hide my eyes from you. Yes, even though you multiply prayers (in other words, many prayers), I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.*

1:16 *"Wash your hands, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil.*

1:17 *"Learn to do good; seek justice. Reprove the ruthless; defend the orphan, plead for the widow.*

1:18 *"Come now, and let us reason together,' says YHWH. 'Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.'"*

The Lord speaks strongly here, but He also offers forgiveness. *"Though your sins are as scarlet, they will*

be white as snow." He offers us forgiveness; but let us examine the core of the matter.

Let's go back to Matthew chapter 15.

*Matt 15:8 "This people honors Me with their lips, but their **heart** is far away from Me."*

Friends, the Lord desires our *hearts*. What is in my heart and yours? A little further on in verse 18, He says:

Matt 15:18 "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.

15:19 "For out of the heart come evil thoughts (this is where it begins – in our thought life), murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders,

15:20 "These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."

This passage is in context with the complaint of the Pharisees that the disciples were eating with unwashed hands when they picked and ate wheat. Therefore, Jesus references Scripture to point out that it is not unwashed hands that cause a man's heart to be unclean; it is something which happens inside, the things that happen deep in the heart of man.

The heart has become blunt

I want to backtrack a little to Matthew chapter 13. Once again it is Jesus speaking here.

Matt 13:14 "And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled (again Isaiah), which says, 'You will keep on hearing but not understand; and you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;

*13:15 "For **the heart** of this people has **become dull**, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I should heal them."*

There are a few things that I can do well, but the one place where I am not proficient, is in the kitchen. My wife is very good in the kitchen. She cooks delicious food, and I am totally content. I can't and wouldn't want to compete with her. However, there is one thing that I do know about the area of the kitchen: you cannot cut tomatoes with a blunt knife – it just won't penetrate the skin.

Friends, the Lord wants to use us, but the knife is blunt; the heart is blunt. We don't hear His voice anymore. We don't know the voice of the Holy Spirit. I have spoken to countless believers over the years, who have asked, *"How do you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit?"* In other words, it is a general problem amongst believers – they don't know God's voice.

Let's take a look at John chapter 12. This is an interesting passage. Here Jesus is praying a general prayer, and He says,

John 12:28 "Father glorify Thy name.' There came therefore a voice out of heaven: 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.'"

In other words, God the Father answers Jesus in an audible voice which the multitude could hear. The next verse reads:

12:29 "The multitude therefore, who stood by and heard it, were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, 'An angel has spoken to Him.'"

How do we know what Jesus prayed there? And how do we know what the Father answered? The disciples heard it, of course; they remembered it and wrote it down later. But how is it that the multitude, who heard the same words spoken, *thought that it was thunder*? They don't know God's voice, and when it is clearly audible, they attribute it to being *coincidental thunder*. Their hearts are *blunt*!

Friends, I wonder how many times the Father has spoken to us through the Holy Spirit, and we attributed it to thunder – to *some coincidence* that might have just taken place. We look around us and wonder, *did something just happen*? Dear friends, this refers to hearts and spiritual ears that are blunt; we don't hear the voice of the Holy Spirit anymore. Jesus says in John 10:

John 10:27 "My sheep hear My voice ..."

In other words, we are supposed to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. In the book of Revelation chapters 2 and 3, we find that the Lord sends out seven letters to seven churches through the apostle John. Each church receives a specific message, but each of these seven messages ends with the same words: *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."* Therefore,

the Holy Spirit is speaking. Do you and I have ears to hear?

In the parable of the sower sowing the seed, Jesus also says, *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."* (Mark 4:9,23) He uses the same words. Do we have ears to hear, or are our hearts and spiritual ears blunt?

Samuel

There is a beautiful story in the Old Testament in the first book of Samuel. In the first few chapters, we read about Samuel's mother, Hannah. Here was a woman who couldn't have children and it disturbed her greatly. One day when the family went to the temple, she came before the Lord and wept bitterly before Him. She prayed, *"Lord, please give me a son, and if You give me a son, I will dedicate his life to You."*

This is a vow that she makes to God. It is no small matter. Eli, the high priest, sees her praying, but he only notices her lips moving and assumes that she is drunk. He approaches her and says, *"How long will you make yourself drunk? Put away your wine from you."*

Hannah answers him, *"No, my lord, I am a woman oppressed in spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before YHWH."*

Eli then replies by giving her a prophetic word. He says: *"May the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him."*

The Scripture says that Hannah arose, and *her face was no longer sad*. She received the word in faith; her

countenance changed, and she returned home full of joy. Shortly after that, she fell pregnant and little Samuel was born. She weaned Samuel; it is not certain how long it took, perhaps three years.

After Samuel is weaned, Hannah goes with her husband, Elkanah and this young child to the temple. She comes before Eli and says, *"My lord, do you remember the day I prayed at the temple? This is the child that I prayed for that day. I dedicate him now to YHWH for the rest of his life, according to the vow that I made to YHWH on that day."*

She then leaves the child with Eli. I'm not sure what Eli thought, since he was now responsible for this young boy who was dedicated to YHWH and who needs to grow up in the temple.

Little Samuel grows up in the presence of YHWH. This is where he sleeps every night; this is where he lives day and night – in the presence of YHWH. The Bible doesn't tell us how old Samuel was, but one night Samuel lays on his bed and hears YHWH call, *"Samuel, Samuel."*

Samuel thinks it is the high priest who is calling him. He jumps out of bed and runs to Eli and says to him, *"Here I am, for you called me."*

Eli says, *"I did not call, go and lie down again."*

Samuel goes back to bed. Not long after that, YHWH calls him again, *"Samuel, Samuel."*

Samuel is not conceited. He jumps out of bed again, goes to Eli quickly, and says, *"Here I am, for you called me."*

Eli answers, *"I did not call you, my son, go and lie down again."*

Samuel returns to his bed again, and the Father calls him a third time, *"Samuel, Samuel."*

Once more Samuel jumps out of his bed and goes to Eli, and says, *"Here I am, for you called me."*

The high priest, Eli, begins to realise that this is YHWH who is calling Samuel. He tells Samuel, *"Go and lie down again, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant is listening.'"*

Picture this little boy getting back into bed. He is wide awake now. **YHWH** is about to speak to him. He lies there and waits for YHWH to speak. He doesn't wait long before he again hears the voice, *"Samuel, Samuel."*

"Speak, Lord, for Thy servant is listening," says the young boy. YHWH gives this child, perhaps four or five years of age, a dynamic prophetic word for the nation, as well as a serious message of admonition for the high priest, Eli.

Friends, the message that I would like to bring across with this story, is this: Eli was the high priest of Israel. He was the man of God for the nation; he was *responsible for the spiritual well-being of the nation of Israel*, God's people. It takes this man of God, the honoured high priest, *three times* before he realises that YHWH is speaking. But *the child hears YHWH's voice the first time, and he immediately obeys* by responding to His voice without hesitation. No wonder that Jesus said we should be like little children. We ought to have yielded

hearts *like children* in order to *hear His voice* clearly and to *obey it immediately*.

My prayer is, "*Lord, may I be like a child. I want to hear Your voice clearly every time.*"

Warnings about the last days

I think we are in the same situation in these last days; there are many religious happenings around us, but the religious leaders sadly seldom hear God's voice any more. We need children – people whose *hearts are tender* and open to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, and not merely to do religious things. In 2 Timothy 3 Paul gives a warning about the last days.

2Tim 3:1 "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.

3:2 "For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy ..."

In the following verses, he gives a long list of sins that we will encounter in the last days, which are also, according to Paul, the cause of the difficult days that lie ahead.

The mask of religious pride

A part of that long list of sins is found in verse 5. He says:

3:5 "Holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power ..."

The *form of godliness*. There is a *mask* covering it. It seems as though we are godly people, but there is no more power. There is no longer the reality of a *relationship with Jesus Christ*. There is only *religion*. And according to Paul, this is one of the reasons why there are troubles – difficult times – in these last days.

In Revelation we read, "*... you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.*" (Rev 3:1) In the last of the seven letters to the churches, the letter to Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22), which also represents the church of the last days, Jesus tells them that they are *lukewarm* and that He would *spit them out of His mouth*.

He says that they would hold onto a religion – a name that they are alive, but their hearts are cold toward Jesus. Friends, these are serious words.

The treasure of the heart, and its fruit

Let us continue to look at Matthew chapter 12. Again, it is Jesus speaking here, and He says:

Matt 12:33 "Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit

*12:34 "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For **the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.**"*

The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The New King James translation says it like this: "*Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.*" What

happens inside our hearts, is also that which will come out of our mouths.

12:35 "The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil."

Friends, what we plant in our hearts, will be what comes out of our mouths. And what we speak, that is who we become – that is the direction in which we go.

James speaks of the tongue. He says the tongue is like the rudder of a ship. Ships which sail on vast oceans, which are *"driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder, wherever the inclination of the pilot desires."* (James 3:4)

That rudder *gives direction* to the ship. *The tongue is the same*. What proceeds out of our mouths, *gives direction* to our lives. And friends, what comes out of the mouth, *comes out of the heart*. And what comes out here, gives our life direction. Be careful what you *plant in your heart*.

My wife and I once travelled with a dear Christian lady in the Free State; we were her passengers, she was driving since it was her car. We drove through an automatic electric gate, and just as she went through the gate, it started closing. She got a fright and swore without thinking. As soon as the swear word left her mouth, she realised that we were in the car. She felt embarrassed and apologised, *"I didn't mean to say that word, I just got a fright."*

While she was offering excuses, I thought to myself, *"That little word was planted in her heart long ago – it was the pressure that brought it out."*

Because, friends, what is in our heart, will come out when we are under pressure. This is what *gives direction* to our lives, that which is planted in our hearts. Be careful what you plant in your heart.

The tablet of the heart

Let's go back to the Old Testament again and look at Jeremiah chapter 17.

Jer 17:1 "The sin of Judah is written down with an iron stylus; with a diamond point it is engraved upon the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of their altars."

The *sin of Judah*. Who is Judah? It is the Jews, two tribes of Judah and Benjamin – God's people. He speaks of the *sin* of God's people. That sin is *engraved*, carved into the *tablet of their hearts* with an iron stylus. It is written here in our hearts.

In those days, they would take clay and make tablets out of it. While the clay was still soft, they would write whatever they wanted to write on it with an iron stylus. Then they would bake the clay tablet in an oven so that it would get hard. Once it was hard and those words were written on it, friends, they were *engraved*. It was impossible for the words to be removed.

I don't know if you did what I did when I was in high school. We had wooden desks, and I am sure that there are quite a few desks at Milton High School in Bulawayo,

Zimbabwe, on which *H Jackson* is engraved. Friends, when you do something like that, and you realise that you have made a mistake, you cannot simply take an eraser and erase it quickly. It is **in** there. And whatever is engraved there, stays there, and it remains as an eternal witness of what you have done.

Friends, there are things that we have done, or things that have been done to us, that we wish never happened. There are things that you wish you never did, but you did do them. They are there, engraved. Some of those things are painful. Some people have been abused as a child, molested by family members, or there might have been other terrible things that were done to you. Or perhaps there are terrible things that you yourself have done, sins that you have committed, and you wish, "*Oh Lord, if only I hadn't done those things, but I have done them. It is engraved here in my heart.*" I want to ask an important question:

"Is it possible to erase that engraving? Is it possible?"

I intend to examine this topic in greater depth in the next message of this series. There is, however, another question that I also wish to ask in this connection, "*If it is possible for these painful heart-memories to be erased, how can it be done?*" Let's examine this more closely.

Deceitful is the heart

Let us take a closer look at what the Bible has to say about the heart. In verse 9 of Jeremiah 17, the prophet continues,

*Jer 17:9 "The heart is more **deceitful** than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"*

*17:10 "I, YHWH, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man **according to his ways**, according to the results of his deeds."*

In other words, you will *reap what you have sown*. You will reap that harvest. But he says: "*The heart is more deceitful ...*"

Deceitful?

May I ask you,

"Whose heart is he speaking of here?"

Probably the people out there.

The heart is deceitful. *Whose heart?*

When the Lord revealed these things to me, I preached about it for six months; and the more I preached about this, the more I realised that the Lord was actually dealing with *me* about *my own heart*. Me, the minister, me, the pastor; it was *my heart* that wasn't right.

What does the word *deceitful* mean? Think about it.
Deceitful!

Imagine that I have an old car that has 500 000 km on the clock, which I want to sell. I wash the car and polish the wheels and I turn the reading of the odometer down to 120 000 km. That is deceit, isn't it? That would be fraud - deception.

But let us think about this carefully. What would I really be doing? I would be displaying a car that *seems* to be in good condition. However, *beneath the bonnet* there is something seriously wrong.

A *deceitful heart* means that I wear a *mask*. I want people to think that I am nice – a good, religious person. We wear masks; we attend church, we dress smartly. We are at church every Sunday. We do things that seem good. We are a religious nation, aren't we? However, dear friends, what does the *heart* look like? What is going on *deep down inside the heart*? Deceitful means that I *cover up sin* that is in my heart. No one knows what is going on. I *hide it*. I *wear a mask*. I make it appear as if I am a good person.

Friends, as I asked earlier,

"Whose heart is he speaking of?"

My heart, or *your heart*, or the hearts of the *other people* out there?

We, as a *religious nation*, tend to wear masks. And we need to be careful. When I read further in Jeremiah 37, I read about the time when Jeremiah warns the people of Israel.

"You are busy with wrong things, you must turn back."

Do not deceive yourselves

He warns them that if they will not return to YHWH, that the Chaldeans, the people of Babylon, would come and destroy their city. And then he says,

Jer 37:9 "Thus says the Lord, 'Do not deceive yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans will surely go away from us, for they will not go.'"

"Do not deceive yourselves ..."

This is interesting. One would think it is possible to deceive someone else, but to deceive *yourself* with lies, with things that aren't true, is unusual. That one would eventually believe one's own lie so strongly as if it is the truth, but it isn't the truth. You are believing a lie.

"Do not deceive yourselves."

How did these Jews deceive themselves?

1. We are *Jews*, we are *God's people*. There is no way that these Chaldeans will come, because God will protect us – after all, we are His people.
2. We live in *Jerusalem* – *God's city*. There is no way that these Chaldeans will come. God will protect us, we are safe.
3. The *temple* of Solomon is in this city. It is *God's habitation*, God's presence abides there. The Chaldeans will certainly not invade us. God will protect us because His presence is here. We are OK.

But herein lies the deceit, my friend:

"We can do what we please, we can live any way we want to, because we are a *religious nation*, us Afrikaner people. *God will protect us*. Surely, He won't allow evil people to do bad things to us, or to rule over us. We are safe because we are a *religious nation*."

No, friend, that is *self-deceit*.

We say that we are religious, but behind the scenes we do things that are an abomination before the Lord. We celebrate our sabbaths, yes; we continue our gatherings, yes; there are the so-called good things that we do, yes; but what do our hearts look like? Where are our hearts?

Where is your heart? Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Or do you merely have a *religion*? What does it look like *deep inside your heart*?

What leads us to deception of the heart?

The book of Obadiah is small prophetic book in the Old Testament. This book has only one chapter. Obadiah prophesies against the Edomites – the descendants of Esau.

*Obad 1:3 "The **arrogance of your heart** has deceived you ..."*

What does the word *arrogance* mean? *Pride, haughtiness*. Pride and arrogance deceive our own hearts.

The Bible mentions a few times that pride leads to a fall. The devil himself fell out of heaven, why? Because of his pride. And he afflicts us, he tempts us through the same thing – through pride. He knows if he can get us to be proud by convincing us "*what good, religious people we are,*" and how "*God is on our side, after all,*" that we will make mistakes. Then we will *wear a mask*. It will *appear that we are good*, but in reality, things inside are not right. We *deceive ourselves*.

Friends, *be careful of pride*. Be careful, because that is where the deceitfulness of the heart begins.

The prodigal son

I want to close today's message with a story from Luke 15. Jesus tells the story of the prodigal son. You all know the story. This young man had issues at home – the Bible doesn't tell us what those issues were. But this boy said to his father,

"Give me my inheritance, I want to go."

His father gives it to him, and he is gone.

But friends, if you *start with such a wrong attitude*, and pride and arrogance and greed are involved, you can be sure you're *headed for the abyss*. And where that young man goes, he spirals further and further downward until he eventually doesn't have any money left, and all his so-called friends have disappeared. Eventually he doesn't even have food to eat and he must beg and look for work.

He finally finds work with a farmer to look after pigs. Imagine this young Jewish boy having to look after *pigs* - these unclean animals that he must look after. It is the lowest kind of work for a Jewish boy. And there he sits in the pig sty.

I call it the *precious pigsty*. There are times when the Lord brings us to a place, *a pigsty; a wilderness*. We think it is a terrible place, but it is precisely at that place where we meet the Lord, hear His voice, and finally come to our senses.

How often does the Bible speak of the *wilderness*? He deliberately leads us to the wilderness. Hosea tells us about the wilderness. YHWH leads His people to the wilderness, and *there in the wilderness He speaks to their heart* (Hosea 2:13).

This young man is in the pigsty. And he is hungry. He longs to eat of the pigs' food, that is how hungry he is. And that, the Bible says, is where he *comes to his senses*. He says to himself, "*I will go back to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned, forgive me.'*"

This *place of honesty* is where the engraved heart's *restoration process begins*.

Father, *I* have sinned. Please forgive *me*.

In Part 2, we will discuss the restoration process of the heart further.