

The Heart of God (1)

Call to Worship

Psalm 34:1 I will extol the Lord at all times, his praise will always be on my lips.

Psalm 16:2 I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing".

Prayer

Lord, in everything I read, sing, pray and hear as I worship today, I want to exalt and extol the name of Jesus. Come Holy Spirit, fill me now, that my heart will overflow with living water to praise the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Amen

Song: "We want to see Jesus lifted high" by Doug Horley

We want to see Jesus lifted high, a banner that flies across this land,
That all men might see the truth and know, He is the way to heaven.

We want to see, we want to see, we want to see Jesus lifted high.
We want to see, we want to see, we want to see Jesus lifted high.

Step by step we are moving forward, little by little we're taking ground.
Every prayer a powerful weapon, strongholds come tumbling down,
And down, and down, and down.

We want to see, we want to see, we want to see Jesus lifted high.
We want to see, we want to see, we want to see Jesus lifted high.

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Prayer of Intercession

Lord, as I face the challenges of each day, I am so thankful for those who surround me with love, and support, and pray for me.

I thank you for, and pray for, those in my family.

I thank you for, and pray for, those in my church.

And I pray for those in the world's trouble spots, who may be feeling forgotten and uncared for. I pray those affected by conflicts in the Middle East, in Eastern Europe, and those affected by civil war, by terrorist attacks, by abductions, in some African nations. I pray especially for those recently abducted in Nigeria.

I pray that you will move in my heart and in the hearts of Christians around the world, that we will give to, pray for and support our brothers and sisters in these places. I pray for Barnabas Aid, for Open Doors, for the Bible Society and others that bring food, income support and the Scriptures to those in these circumstances.

All these things I pray in the name of my Lord Jesus. Amen

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Bible Readings:

- Luke 19:41-44
As he (Jesus) approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it
- Matthew 6:9-15
This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”.
For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Song: “How Deep the Father’s Love” (Stuart Townend)

1. How deep the Father’s love for us, how vast beyond all measure,
That He should give His only Son to make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss, the Father turns his face away
As wounds which mar the Chosen One bring many sons to glory.
2. Behold the man upon a cross, my sin upon His shoulders.
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held him there until it was accomplished.
His dying breath has brought me life, I know that it is finished.
3. I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom,
But I will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer,
But this I know with all my heart, His wounds have paid my ransom.

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Message: “The Heart of God”

I have a long association with an orphanage, or children’s village, in Thailand, and am close friends with the Thai leadership there. A number of years ago a team of us (the South Aussie Builders) were there on our annual mission trip. Next to the visitors’ accommodation where we were sleeping, the Thai CEO lived in a small unit. One evening while we were relaxing after our day’s work, we heard a loud weeping coming from next door, so a couple of us rushed over to see what was wrong. We found her lying face down on the floor weeping and calling out loudly in Thai and in tongues. After a while she explained to us that she was calling out to God for the nation of Thailand. What love and compassion she had for her country, for its spiritual welfare, for its idol worship, and what grief that it wasn’t close to God.

BUT THAT IS THE HEART OF GOD. IS IT MY HEART? IS IT YOURS?

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I'm not sure I have ever felt such depth of feeling for my country, although it certainly needs it. We need to pray regularly for Australia. Or, for that matter, our city or town. A month ago nearly 5000 people marched in Adelaide for the protection of the unborn and for the mothers and families affected by abortion. "Love Adelaide" is the organisation organising the annual marches and advocating with legislators. It is passionate about both Adelaide and the nation in its treatment of babies and mothers – "Love them Both" is the catchcry.

We all know the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey and through palm-waving crowds. Less well known (Luke 19:41-45) is that as he approached Jerusalem, he looked at the city and wept for it. Such is the heart of God, and it should be ours as we pray also for our church, for its unity, for its mission. Paul prayed earnestly for "his" churches, and you can almost hear the pain in his letters as he pleads with them about their snobbishness at the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-22), division over leaders (1 Cor 1:10-17), turning away to a different gospel (Gal 1:6-7). This is the heart of God for his church, and we too should be praying with a heart like God's over our own churches and even our denomination.

You have probably heard of Corrie ten Boom, who as a young teenager in Amsterdam in WW2 was arrested with her family for hiding Jews and was sent to the Ravensbruck concentration camp. She survived, but her sister and father both died there. We know of the deprivations and indignities that she would have suffered in such a place. You may also know of the struggle she had with forgiveness. Post-war she travelled the world and spoke at many meetings with her message of faith, hope and forgiveness, to which she could testify after her experiences.

Once, after such a meeting in Germany, she was approached by a man who said he was a guard at Ravensbruck, had since become a Christian, and asked for her forgiveness. He of course did not recognise her, but she instantly recognised him as one of the cruellest guards and recalled his brutality and having been forced to parade naked before him. Below I quote directly from the voice of Corrie ten Boom. To add poignancy to her heartrendingly powerful response as she related it, her voice was accompanied by her photo, and a background of scenes from the concentration camp – the gaunt inmates, the terrible conditions, the stark burial pits.

The guard said, "I was a guard at Ravensbruck. I've become a Christian now. I know I did some very cruel things, but I've received God's forgiveness for the cruelties I've done, and I asked God's grace for an opportunity to ask one of my victims for forgiveness. Fraulein ten Boom, once you were forgiven. Will you forgive me?"

Corrie relates, "And, I could not. I remembered the suffering of my dying sister through him. And I was not able, I could not, I could only hate him. And then I said, 'Thank you Jesus, that you have brought into my heart God's love through the Holy Spirit who was given to me. And thank you Father that your love is stronger than my hatred and unforgiveness'. That same moment, I was free. And I could say, 'Brother give me your hand'. And I shook hands with him, and it was as if I felt God's love stream through my arms. You've never touched the ocean of God's love as when you forgive your enemies. Can you forgive? No. I can't either. But he can."

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It seems impossible to forgive in these circumstances. It may seem impossible to forgive in some of our own circumstances. BUT THAT IS THE HEART OF GOD. IS IT MY HEART? IS IT YOURS? Imagine the Good Friday scene. Jesus naked, nailed to a cross, his back torn to ribbons rubbing against the rough wood. But that suffering is not emphasised in the gospel accounts. Rather it is the burden of the sin of mankind which was his greatest suffering. We can't understand exactly how, but it severed him from his Father, and he cried out in his anguish, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" That is not an irrelevant event of 2000 years ago, but, as the song above says, "It was *my* sin that held him there", and "ashamed I hear *my* mocking voice call out among the scoffers". God's heart is to love and forgive to the extent that he sent Jesus to suffer the penalty for my, and all of our sin.

God's heart is to forgive, and he holds it so closely that it comes with a condition – that we forgive others. The parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:21-35) was told to teach this point. And Jesus himself said immediately after teaching the Lord's Prayer (above), "If you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins", and in Mark 11:25, "...if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins".

It's pretty clear, but not easy. "If you hold anything....." – grudges, annoyances, dislikes, major betrayals, deep hurts, blame – anything! But like Corrie ten Boom, we cannot! It can only be the love of God flooding through us, the power of the Holy Spirit in us, that enables us to do it. And as we do it, we touch, and are touched by the heart of God.

Discovering the heart of God, and letting his heart become our heart, is life changing and life-giving. It's an exciting journey with the Father, and it is a Trinitarian experience with the loving Father, the Saviour Jesus, and the empowering Spirit.

One of Corrie's most powerful statements was, "that same moment I was free"! If we do not, cannot forgive, we leave ourselves in deep bondage. It is said that refusing to forgive is like drinking poison and hoping the other person will die. What freedom is ours when we forgive. It liberates relationships with others, it liberates us, and restores our relationship with the Father. FORGIVENESS IS THE HEART OF GOD. IS IT MINE? IS IT YOURS?

I have mentioned only two aspects of the heart of God – his passionate love for his people, whether nation or church, and his heart for forgiveness. There are of course so many facets of God's heart, and after being blessed myself in exploring these two, I'm looking forward to covering more. That's why I have called this message "The Heart of God (1)". A sequel next month or so.

Song: "Make me a Channel of Your Peace" by St Francis of Assisi (S Temple)

1. Make me a channel of your peace, where there is hatred let me bring your love.
Where there is injury, your pardon Lord, and where there is doubt true faith in you.
2. Make me a channel of your peace, where there is despair in life let me bring hope,
Where there is darkness only light, and where there's sadness ever joy.

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3. Oh, Master grant that I may never seek, so much to be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love with all my soul.
4. Make me a channel of your peace, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
It is in giving to all men that we receive, and in dying that we are born to eternal life
5. Oh, Master grant that I may never seek, so much to be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love with all my soul.
6. Make me a channel of your peace, where there is despair in life let me bring hope,
Where there is darkness only light, and where there's sadness ever joy.

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Benediction

May we live each day in the freedom that comes from the forgiveness paid for on the cross, and through the forgiveness of others by the Holy Spirit working in you.

May we be a channel of God's peace. Amen

This service was prepared by Ron Tiller, HopeNet SA