

30.10.16 Communion Sunday evening Service

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Date: 30 October 2016

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 0 0] but as we turn to God's word let's just pray together Lord our Heavenly Father we pray that as we turn to your word now that we would hear your voice that you would speak to us that you would draw us all close to you that you would bless us and that our faith in you and our love for you would grow have mercy on us, help us and bless us, Amen I will please turn back to the passage that we read in the book of Hosea now for those of you who haven't been here for the other two English services that I did we've been kind of doing a sort of mini series in our services where we've been looking at the images that the Bible uses to describe God and behind that lies a very important principle the fact that whilst at the one level

God is incredibly close to us he's right here in our midst right here at the same time God is utterly beyond us because describing God thinking about God getting a firm grasp on everything that God is is too much for even the greatest of human minds so God is near to us but God is beyond us because God is God he is creator and we are just creature so in order to help us the Bible is wonderful because the Bible uses imagery to help us see and to understand what God is like and in particular the Bible can use sort of body parts God obviously is spirit he doesn't have a physical body like we have but the Bible speaks of body parts to help us understand and we looked at two of these we first of all looked at God's hand which is a reference you get a lot in the Bible and it's a picture of God's strength and power when the Bible talks about a hand it's talking about strength and God has immense strength immeasurable strength he is the strongest force there is but he uses that strength for us for our benefit and he uses that strength to be present with us to protect us to provide for us and to take us as his own possession so we saw God's hand an image of strength yesterday we looked at God's face again a common image that you have we were in Psalm 27 but you can find lots of places in the Bible especially in the Psalms of God's face and we said that God's face really represents two things openness and closeness the fact that God wants us face to face with him in the sense that he opens himself to us and we are to be open before him but the amazing thing is that rather than that openness leading God to want to push us away

God wants to draw us close and we have the same idea when you're face to face with somebody that means you're close to them so we see that God wants us to come as we are to come open but to come close tonight we're going to look at one final image and this is a very rare one but it's probably the most important of all God's heart God's heart now the imagery of heart is very important in the Bible although the references to God's heart are rare as we'll say later on references to the heart in general and to people's hearts are very common and it's quite a wide ranging image and it focuses on various things and we can highlight three of these in particular to begin with which is these three things that really sum up much of what the Bible means when it talks about your heart so three things briefly to begin with first of all your heart is where you hold the things that really matter to you if something is really important it's a matter of the heart we see that in various places

Psalm 37 verse 4 delight yourself in the Lord he will give you the desires of your heart the things you really want Psalm 77 I said let me remember my song in the night let me meditate in my heart if I'm really thinking about something it's in my heart Mary is a good example Luke 2 19 tells us Mary treasured up all these things pondering them in her heart Mary saw many amazing things so where did she ponder them in her heart and so your heart is where you hold the things that really matter that's the biblical presentation and that makes perfect sense to us because we do exactly the same thing don't we we refer to things that we do with our whole heart with all our heart and the Bible uses the same language Deuteronomy 6 5 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul with all your might and the emphasis in that verse is that you are to love the Lord with your whole being all that you are you are to love

God it is the matter of utmost importance and priority and we say exactly the same thing we say if somebody is going to do something with real determination and effort you'll say he's going to put his heart and soul into it he's going to do it with all his heart so if you want to know what really matters to you look in your heart that's why God says man looks on the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart because that's where the things that really matter are kept and we have to pause here and just emphasise a really important point of application when we come to church when we come to worship God this is the level of analysis that we are interested in we are not here to be superficial we are not here just for a nice get together we are not here just to spend a wee bit of time together and then drift along as if nothing happens we are here to think about what really matters what really matters so what is it that really matters to you what really matters so easy in life to drift along so easy to blast from one week to the next to the next

[7 : 28] I don't know about you I can't believe it's nearly November it's just frightening time just flies by it's so easy to just drift along to be carried along through life and we have to see when did we last stop and ask ourselves what really matters and am I putting these things first so your heart is where you put things that are really important the things that really matter secondly your heart is where you feel the pain of things that really hurt the Bible makes that clear the Bible uses the heart to describe our emotions and that is done in a wide range of ways sometimes it's in a joyful way like Psalm 16 therefore my heart is glad my whole being rejoices my flesh also dwells secure so the Bible knows that when we rejoice we rejoice in our heart but the Bible also knows that when we hurt when we really hurt it's in our hearts Nehemiah 2 2 the king said to me why is your face sad seeing you are not sick this is nothing but sadness of the heart 1st Samuel 28 5 when Saul saw the army of the Philistines he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly the heart speaks of the things that really hurt and again we use the same language today we talk of having a heartfelt concern for somebody who's in need and when devastating things happen we talk about being heart broken and I am sure every single one of you would agree that a broken heart is the worst pain of all what would you choose a broken leg or a broken heart that's where we feel the things that are really really hurting and this is where we are reminded of the amazing truth that the

Bible is not a book that pretends everything will always be fine and Christianity isn't calling people to go through life pretending that nothing is ever wrong and a church like this is not a place for people who are always doing great and always coping and always managing fine the Bible is a book for the broken hearted and it doesn't pretend that life is always fine and that's why if you feel like that today and maybe you do you can come to God and you will find comfort and understanding and help listen to what it says in Psalm 147 verse 3 he heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds our hearts is where we feel pain more than anything else but God is here to comfort the broken hearted and he's here to help you where it hurts the most so the Bible when it talks about the heart it's talking about the things that really matter it's talking about the things that really hurt but thirdly the Bible also uses the language of the heart to describe the fact that our hearts move us into action this is really really important because the Bible is like us in the sense that it uses the heart to describe our emotions our intellect our understanding the way we're feeling we do the same thing but the Bible goes further than that because the Bible makes a very clear and deliberate link between our heart and our actions they're not separated they're absolutely bound together our actions are the outworking of the state of our hearts and there's lots of examples in the Bible of that people obey

God because of the state of their hearts Exodus 25 verse 1 the Lord said to Moses speak to the people of Israel that they take for me a contribution from every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me people obey God because of the state of their hearts the opposite is true people disobey God because of the state of their hearts Exodus 8 15 but when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite he hardened his heart and would not listen to them as the Lord had said and Jesus sums this up perfectly and beautifully and so clearly in Matthew 15 18 when he says what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart and this defiles a person for out of the heart come evil thoughts murder adultery sexual immorality theft false witness slander these are what defile a person there is a fundamental connection between our heart and our actions if something really matters in our hearts we will act upon it

I remember when my son was getting swimming lessons it was while I was still studying in Edinburgh and we used to go for swimming lessons in Burnt Island we lived in Kirkcudby Burnt Island was a wee bit by Fabus you've got Arnish up in that place where people come from we went for swimming lessons at Burnt Island and at the pool there was a really really good pool but there was like a kind of like a viewing area where you could go and watch the pool watch them swimming and it wasn't like remember the old sports centre in Stornoway where you could watch but it was all glass here there was no glass it was open so if you imagine that those windows weren't there it was just an open balcony you could watch the swimming lessons going on and there was a boy swimming across and you know swimming lessons that sometimes it's a case that they're just managing no more and so there was two boys swimming across and one was doing quite well but there was a boy behind who was struggling and the boy who was behind was struggling started holding on to the boy who was doing quite well and of course as he was holding on to that boy they were both starting to go on there because swimming with someone holding on to is impossible and the mother of the boy who was being held on to was on the balcony and without even thinking she clapped her hands and shouted to the life guard to make sure that he would help and so what was so precious in her heart moved her to act without even thinking if something really matters to us we will act upon it in our lives now I want to pause here because this raises a really important point because it reminds us that there is something very very wrong and something very amiss if someone says

I believe in God but it's just between me and him and it doesn't come into my life now people say that it's like they claim that God is special in their heart but they're not going to act upon it now that's just not how it works if it's not going to come into your life then is it really in your heart at all that's why Jesus says that each tree is known by its fruit how do people know that we are Christians by what we do by how we act because our love for God in our hearts makes us do stuff makes us live differently our faith what really matters to us is shown in outward action so these I think are in many ways we could say much more but these are we're trying to just summarize what the

[15 : 53] Bible teaches when it uses the imagery of heart when it's talking about our heart so we'll just recap your heart is where you keep where you hold that which really matters to you your heart is where you feel the pain of that which really hurts and your heart is what shapes and moves your actions now these three things are true of me and you but the amazing thing is they are also true of God God's heart is exactly the same and we'll see if we can see why from his word as I said at the beginning the imagery of God's hand and the imagery of God's face are really common in the Bible you'll read them a lot but the imagery of heart although it's common for people specific descriptions of God's heart are actually very rare not many of them in the

Bible but they are there and those which are there reveal some amazing truths and they reveal to us that the three principles we've just described are true of God's heart first of all God's heart is where he holds that which really matters and we see that in Psalm 33 verse 11 the counsel of the Lord stands forever the plans of his heart to all generations I'll read that again the counsel of the Lord stands forever the plans of his heart to all generations that's telling us that God has a heart and God's heart has plans God's heart is the place where his plans are made it's where his desires and purposes lie in other words that's where he holds the things that really matter and that reminds us of a fundamentally important point that there are certain things that really matter to God that's why

David is described in the following way in 1 Samuel 13 14 the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people David was chosen because he was in line with God's heart to be after God's heart is to be in line with God's plans with God's purposes with God's desires to be in tune with the things that really matter to God now this raises some really important fundamental theological points and we're just going to mention three really big important theological points first of all there are things that really matter to God that means it dismisses any possibility of man made ideas about the nature and character of God it dismisses any man made ideas about it the Bible is telling us that there are definite and certain truths about the nature of

God in other words there are things that God is and there are things that God isn't there are things that God likes and there are things that God doesn't like and this is probably the most basic truth about God and yet it is one that millions of people forget and it's one of the most common mistakes that people make because we decide what God is like and we decide which parts of the Bible we want to accept and we choose the terms and conditions in which our relationship with God is going to be based we determine what it is so many people do that and it is completely illogical regardless of the fact that it's wrong it's totally illogical if God is God we don't decide what he's like

God is who he is that's why his name means I am that's the fundamental truth about God there's certain things that matter to him and our job is not to decide what those things are our job is to listen to what they are our job is simply to listen so man-made ideas of God are just impossible God reveals himself to us secondly this fact that certain things matter to God dismiss any possibility of God being changeable or untrustworthy certain things matter to God and they will always matter to him the things that are in God's heart are firm and they don't change and this is where God stands in such wonderful wonderful contrast to the world because how often are we the victims of other people changing their plans how often as a nation are we relying on a political party or a leader to do something and then their plans change or even somebody local we know they're going to do something and then they don't do it they change their plans so often we get half hearted promises don't we it's a promise made with half your heart so the other half's not really guaranteeing that it'll be kept and very often it's the other half that wins and we are surrounded by that in the world today and it's quite interesting

[22 : 02] I mean I'm not a sort of sociologist and I'm not really an expert at looking at the world and examining why the world is the way it is but if you look at the world today especially the western world I think a lot of people are incredibly delusioned because there's no whole heartedness there's half heartedness everywhere especially in politics somebody will say well I'll be a bit of this and I'll be a bit of that and I'll be a bit of this and I'll be a bit of that and people are so sick of it they are gravitating towards extreme positions now I am not here to advocate Donald Trump but I think people are voting for Donald Trump because what you see is what you get what you see is a bit scary but what you see is what you get and they are looking for wholeheartedness none of us well I certainly don't think any of us like people being half hearted slippery changeable untrustworthy we want there in built in us this desire for people to be true our world is full of half hearted changeable untrustworthy people but God is different

God is different God's plans are not a casual or a changeable topic God is never ever ever half hearted there are things that really matter to God his plans are in his heart his commitment is absolute his consistency is uncompromising and this is why the Bible describes God as the God of truth and a God of righteousness he has standards that he never fails to conform to he is the God of truth who cannot lie God there are things that matter to God and they are held in his heart so we see that there's no possibility of man-made ideas of God there's no possibility of God being changeable or half-heartedly but also this dismisses any possibility of viewing God as detached or uninterested in the world in other words what happens in this world matters to God what happens in this world matters to God and so and so please never ever ever think that God is indifferent to this world or to the things that are going on in this world for centuries people again and again and again have thought of God as this kind of remote being that's maybe there but he's not that interested that's not the

God of the Bible what happens in this world matters to God and and above all other parts of creation what matters to the human race what happens to the human race really matters to God what happens to you matters to God so there are things that matter to God and so if you were to look into God's heart right now you would see absolute truth you would see total righteousness you would see the highest level of consistency that you can imagine you would see an uncompromising commitment to fulfilling his purposes and carrying out his plans there are things that matter to God so that's one thing that's true of God's heart but our second point was that our hearts is where we feel the pain of what really hurts and that is true of God as well now we have to be very very cautious when we speak about the idea of God experiencing pain or suffering because it's not the way we do

God is not this helpless being that's affected by events and can't control his emotions God is not like that but God is not heartless either and the references to God's heart in the Bible are pointing us in this direction and they are telling us that God's heart is where he feels the pain of what really hurts now in order to understand this we need to take a step back and look at the big story of the Old Testament okay so whole Old Testament we'll see if we can sum it up in 30 seconds it starts off creation of the world not long after there's a fall and everything becomes a mess God comes in judgment at the flood doesn't he and then the flood subsides and then in Genesis 12 God starts his purposes so although Genesis 1 begins with the whole world

Genesis 12 God starts his restoration plan with one person with Abraham and he focuses in on Abraham he makes a covenant with him and with his descendants and that's why Genesis then focuses in on Abraham Isaac and Jacob Jacob and his family end up in Egypt so God calls Abraham out of the Chaldees here and he brings them westward kind of to the area of the promised land but Jacob ends up in Egypt as you know and then God starts bringing them back we have the redemption the exodus where God's people are taken out of slavery and they're brought into the promised land and there they're supposed to be established as God's people they are there to live as God's people but the reality is they are not living as God's people because they turn away from God and they rebel against him and despite God's warnings despite God's patience they turn away from him again and again and again and though they had this land it starts falling apart it splits in two eventually the northern kingdom is conquered by Assyria which is when

[28 : 18] Hosea was prophesying and then about 140 years after that the southern kingdom is conquered as well and the southern kingdom is taken away where? To Babylon which is where Abraham had come from in the first place so it's kind of like a big circle really the story of the Old Testament put very very simply so that's the big storyline of the Old Testament the people end up in exile and in that big storyline there are three big acts of judgment on God's part the first is the flood that was a big act of judgment on God's part the second is when the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC the third is the fall of the southern kingdom when Babylon came and conquered those who remained in Judah and that was in 586 BC although it was kind of a long drawn out process but 586 is kind of the pinnacle of that in a sense these are three great big acts of judgment the flood the fall of the northern kingdom the fall of the southern kingdom now you're probably thinking why on earth is he talking about these things well in all of these things

God is acting in judgment because the wickedness of the people is unrelenting and they're devastating events and they are just a very very clear picture of the consequences of sin the people have turned away from God again and again and again and again and again and eventually judgment comes but at each of these three events we are told something about God's heart and it's really interesting to see what it says at the flood Genesis 6 verse 5 the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually and the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him to his heart so the Lord said I will blot out man whom I created from the face of the land man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens for I'm sorry that I have made them but Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord so that was the flood

God's heart is mentioned at the fall of Israel we have this chapter that we've read Hosea 11 and the incredible incredible words of verse 8 how can I give up on you O Ephraim how can I hand you over O Israel how can I make you like Adma how can I treat you like Zeboim now Adma and Zeboim were cities that were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah in the time of Abraham and then it says my heart recoils within me my compassion grows warm and tender and then at the fall of Judah we have the same thing Jeremiah prophesied at that time and there God laments over his people is Ephraim my dear son is he my darling child for as often as I speak against him I do remember him still therefore my heart yearns for him

I will surely have mercy on him declares the Lord do you see what these verses are telling us these verses are telling us that in God's heart there is something that hurts something that really hurts what is it that hurts God when he has to judge sinners now that is astonishing but of all the things the Bible could tell us about God's heart it is emphasising this one point summarised by Ezekiel 18:2 for I have no pleasure in the death of anyone declares the Lord so turn and live and the words of

Hosea 11 are particularly astonishing and I want us to spend a wee minute or two going through them at the start of the chapter it describes God's plans and intentions for his people read the first few verses again when Israel was a child I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son the more they were called the more they went away they kept sacrificing to the baals and burning offerings to idols yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk I took them up by their arms but they did not know that I healed them I led them with cords of kindness with bands of love and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws and I bent down to them and fed them these verses are saying that God had set his heart on his people he was doing everything he could for them but the more they were called the more they went away and the result the inevitable result is judgment Hosea 11 verse 5 onwards they shall not return to the land of

[33 : 51] Egypt but Assyria will be their king they're going to be conquered they're going to lose their land because they've refused to return to me the sword shall rage against their cities consume the bars of their gates and devour them because of their own turning away from me and though they call out to the most high he shall not raise them up at all now at one level when you read to that verse it can seem so clinical can't it god blessed the people they rebelled against them so he's going to judge them and god is simply being consistent because covenant rebellion brings guaranteed judgment god is being true to his word isn't he he's only being fair and it can seem so clinical but then verse 8 tells us how god is feeling how can I give up on you oh Ephraim how can I hand you over oh Israel how can I make you like Adma how can I treat you like Zipporah my heart recoils within me my compassion grows warm and tender god's heart is broken by his people's rebellion now this should shape the way you and I think about god because god has often been the subject of false caricatures maybe you're familiar with

Robert Burns a poem or a song holy will his prayer oh thou that in the heavens dost dwell as it pleased best thyself sends one to heaven and one to hell for thy glory now I don't know if that was Robert Burns his own view of God I don't really know anything about Robert Burns to be honest but if that's your view of God that he just puts one in heaven puts one in hell and doesn't really care if that's your view of God you are wrong you are so wrong because the Bible tells us what is going on in smiling he is not taking an ounce of pleasure in it even Moab Moab was a neighbouring country and they were a nuisance and a harassment to the people of God and yet when judgment comes to them God says my heart moans for Moab like a flute and my heart moans like a flute for the men of

Kir Harsis when judgment comes on the human race that God has God's heart is so that is an unbelievably important thing for us to grasp and if you learn anything from this service tonight please learn this that at the very heart of God is the most intense desire that you will not go to hell that's why those who do go to hell and they do so by their own doing and that will be part of the horror of it all because it's bad enough when something bad happens it's awful it's ten times worse when you know it's your own fault and when it's your own doing in the very heart of

God there is love and compassion and the deepest deepest devotion to you now when we stand before God and when we think about the fact that we need to be in a relationship with God that you need to be a relationship with God God's heart is not the one that needs to suffer God's heart is already towards you and that's why God's earnest desire is that your trust will be in him and that you will be saved and I cannot exaggerate how precious you are to God and please if you've never grasped that before please grasp it tonight so we see these two things we see that in

God's heart there are things that matter to him his ways his standard that matters to him now in the face of sin that inevitably means punishment doesn't it because God and sin are totally incompatible there's things that matter to God his standards matter and that's why sin must be dealt with but at the same time in God's heart there's this overwhelming desire that we would escape punishment that he won't have to condemn us so there's kind of this tension isn't there this way God's standards mean that sinners must be punished and this way God's love for sinners means that he wants to it's been pulled this way it's been pulled that way and this is where we come to the final piece of the jigsaw that God's heart moves him to action and that was what we said thirdly that your heart moves you to act if we are sinners which we are

[39 : 43] God must be true to his heart and judge us but if we are judged we are going to be lost and God's heart will be broken therefore God has taken action and that is why we have the cross that is why Jesus Christ came because there on the cross God was true to his heart his standards were met perfectly sin was punished completely and every single ounce of debt was paid but sinners are saved because God himself takes our place Jesus Christ carries our sin and we are given his righteousness and God's heart is satisfied and this is where we see that God's heart is most clearly expressed on the cross because there we see that God will never compromise and cannot compromise in regard to sin but we also see that

God will not compromise when it comes to saving you because you matter to him you matter to him so much and the words of Paul at the beginning of Galatians chapter 1 remind us of this this is the kind of verse that's so easy to whiz through because it's a benediction at the start of the letter Paul says grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of God our father to whom be the glory forever and ever and so Paul is saying there that Jesus has given himself for our sins to deliver us to rescue us and all of that is according to the will of the father it's what God wants it's what

God's heart moves him to do and so when we are thinking about God's heart it is telling you one thing that God is totally and utterly devoted to you it's moved him into the greatest action ever performed where Jesus came God's heart is devoted to you is your heart devoted to him is it I hope it is Amen let us pray Amen Oh Lord God we thank you for the depths of your love for your commitment to us and for your willingness to act on our behalf

Oh Lord we thank you that you have such a perfect heart and that you have turned that heart towards us and Lord we devote our hearts and our lives to you oh Lord we want to be yours, we want to live for you because you are everything that we want and you're everything that we need thank you Lord that you did not give up on us Amen We're going to close singing to God's place in number 755 in Mission Place When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died

My richest gain I count but loss and poor contempt on all my pride and it's that it's on the cross it's by surveying the cross that we see God's heart and verse 4 maybe sums up everything we've been trying to say where where the whole realm of nature mine that were an offering far too small love so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all let's sing to God's praise grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father to whom be the glory forever and ever Amen Amen Amen