

## ***A Heart Like Jesus***

by Rev. Robert Griffith

What if for one day, Jesus were to become you? Just imagine that for twenty four hours, Jesus wakes up in your bed, walks in your shoes, lives in your house, assumes your schedule. Your neighbours become Jesus' neighbours, your children become Jesus' children, your pains become Jesus' pains. With one exception, nothing about your life changes. Your circumstances don't change. Your health doesn't change. Your schedule isn't altered. Your problems aren't solved. Only one change occurs. For one day and one night, Jesus lives your life with His heart. Your heart gets the day off, and your life is led by the heart of Christ. His priorities govern your actions. His passions drive your decisions. His love directs your behavior. What would you be like?

Would people notice a change? Your family - would they see something new? Your neighbours - would they sense a difference? What about the less fortunate - would you treat them the same? And your friends - would they detect more joy? How about your enemies - would they receive more mercy from Christ's heart than from yours? And you - How would you feel? What alterations would this heart transplant have on your stress level? Your mood swings? Your temper? Would you sleep better? Would you see sunsets differently? Would you see death differently? Any chance you'd need fewer panadol or sedatives? Would you still dread what you are dreading? Better yet, would you still do what you are doing? Would you still do what you had planned to do for the next twenty-four hours?

Pause and think about your schedule; your obligations; your engagements; your outings; your appointments. With Jesus taking over your heart, would anything change? Keep working on this for a moment. Adjust the lens of your imagination until you have a clear picture of Jesus leading your life, then snap the shutter and frame that image. What you just pictured is what God wants and has always wanted. God's plan for you is nothing short of a new heart. If you were a car, God would want control of your engine. If you were a computer, God would claim the software and the hard drive. If you were an airplane, he'd take his seat in the cockpit. But you are a person, so God wants to change your heart.

*"But you were taught to be made new in your hearts, to become a new person. That new person is made to be like God - made to be truly good and holy."* (Ephesians 4:23-24).

God wants you to be just like Jesus. He wants you to have a heart like His. God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be transformed into the image of His son, our Saviour, Jesus. God loves you just the way you are. If you think His love for you would be stronger if your faith were, you are wrong. If you think His love would be deeper if your thoughts were, wrong again. Don't confuse God's love with the love of people. The love of people often increases with performance and decreases with mistakes. Not so with God's love. He loves you right where you are. God's love never ceases. Never. Though we spurn Him, ignore Him, reject Him, despise Him, disobey Him - He will not change.

Our evil cannot diminish God's love and our goodness cannot increase God's love. God is love. Our faith does not earn His love anymore than our stupidity jeopardizes it. God doesn't love us less if we fail or more if we succeed. God's love never increases or decreases. God's love never ceases. God loves you just the way you are, but because of His love, He refuses to leave you that way.

Max Lucado told a story once about when his daughter Jenna was a toddler, he used to take her to a park not far from their apartment. One day as she was playing in a sand-box, an ice-cream salesman approached them. Max purchased her a treat, and when he turned to give it to her, he saw her mouth was full of sand. Where he had intended to put a delicacy, she had put dirt. Did he love her with dirt in her mouth? Absolutely. Was she any less his daughter with dirt in her mouth? Of course not. Was he going to allow her to keep the dirt in her mouth? No way. He loved her the way she was, but he refused to leave her that way. He carried her over to the water fountain and washed out her mouth. Why? Because he loved her.

God does the same for us. He holds us over the fountain. *"Spit out the dirt now ... I've got something better for you."* And so he cleanses us of filth: immorality, dishonesty, prejudice, bitterness, greed, unforgiveness, anger, resentment - anything that will spoil the taste of His love and grace. We don't enjoy the cleansing; sometimes we even opt for the dirt over the ice cream. *"I can eat dirt if I want to!"* we pout and proclaim. Which is true - we can. But if we do, the loss is ours. God has a better offer. He wants us to be just like Jesus.

Now that's why they call the gospel 'good news'? You aren't stuck with today's personality. You aren't condemned to 'grumpydom.' You are tweakable, changeable, upgradable. Even if you've worried each day of your life, you needn't worry the rest of your life. So what if you were born a bigot? You don't have to die one.

Where did we get the idea we can't change? Where do statements like, *"It's just my nature to worry,"* or, *"I'll always be pessimistic. I'm just built that way,"* or, *"I have a bad temper. I can't help the way I am"*? Who told us that? Would we make similar statements about our bodies? *"It's just my nature to have a broken leg. I can't do anything about it."* Of course not. If our bodies malfunction, we seek help. Shouldn't we do the same with our hearts? Shouldn't we seek aid for our sour attitudes? Can't we request treatment for our selfish mood swings? Of course we can. Jesus can change our hearts. He wants us to have a heart like His. Can you imagine a better offer than the heart of Christ? That would surely be the best of the best in the ice-cream truck! Before you consider that trade-off, let me tell you about this heart you are being offered - so you know what your life would be like if you accepted Jesus' offer.

The heart of Jesus was pure. The Saviour was adored by thousands, yet content to live a simple life. He was cared for by women (Luke 8:1-3), yet never accused of lustful thoughts; scorned by His own creation, but willing to forgive them before they even requested His mercy. Peter, who traveled with Jesus for three and a half years, described Him as a *"lamb, unblemished and spotless"* (1 Pet. 1:19). After spending the same amount of time with Jesus, John concluded, *"And in Him is no sin"* (1 John 3:5). Jesus' heart was peaceful. The disciples fretted over the need to feed the thousands, but not Jesus. He thanked God for the problem. The disciples shouted in fear during the storm, but not Jesus. He slept through it. Peter drew his sword to fight the soldiers, but not Jesus. He lifted His hand to heal. His heart was at peace.

When his disciples abandoned Him, did He pout and go home? When Peter denied Him, did Jesus lose His temper? When the soldiers spat in His face, did He breathe fire in theirs? Far from it. He was at peace. He forgave them. He refused to be guided by vengeance. He also refused to be guided by anything other than His high call. His heart was purposeful. Most lives aim at nothing in particular and achieve it. Jesus aimed at one goal - to save humanity from its sin. He could summarize His life with one sentence: *"The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost"* (Luke 19:10). Jesus was so focused on His task that He knew when to say, *"My time has not yet come"* (John 2:4) and when to say, *"It is finished."* (John 19:30). But He was not so focused on His goal that He was unpleasant to live with. Quite the contrary. How pleasant were His thoughts! Children couldn't resist Jesus.

Jesus could find beauty in lilies, joy in worship and possibilities in problems. He would spend days with multitudes of sick people and still feel sorry for them. He spent over three decades wading through the muck and mire of our sin yet still saw enough beauty in us to die for our mistakes. But the crowning attribute of Christ was this: His heart was spiritual. His thoughts reflected His intimate relationship with the Father. *"I am in the Father and the Father is in me,"* He stated (John 14:11). His first recorded sermon begins with the words, *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me"* (Luke 4:18). He was *"led by the Spirit"* (Matt. 4:1) and *"full of the Holy Spirit"* (Luke 4:1). He returned from the desert *"in the power of the Spirit"* (Luke 4:14).

Jesus took His instructions from God. It was His habit to worship (Luke 4:16). It was His practice to memorize Scripture (Luke 4:4). Luke says Jesus *"often slipped away to be alone so he could pray"* (Luke 5:16). His times of prayer guided him. He once returned from prayer and announced it was time to move to another city (Mark 1:38). Another time of prayer resulted in the selection of the disciples (Luke 6:12-13). Jesus was led by an unseen hand. *"The Son does whatever the Father does"* (John 5:19). In the same chapter he stated, *"I can do nothing alone. I judge only the way I am told"* (John 5:30). The heart of Jesus was spiritual.

Does that sound like heart you might like in exchange for yours? Our hearts seem so far from His, don't they? He is pure; we are greedy. He is peaceful; we are stressed. He is purposeful; we are distracted. He is pleasant; we are cranky. He is spiritual; we are earthly. The distance between our hearts and His seems so immense. How could we ever hope to have the heart of Jesus? Are you ready for a surprise? **You already do!** You already have the heart of Christ. If you are a Christian you are a new creation in Christ, you already have the heart of Christ. One of the supreme yet unrealized promises of God is simply this: if you have given your life to Jesus, Jesus has given Himself to you. He has made your heart his home. It would be hard to say it more succinctly than Paul does: *"Christ lives in me"* (Gal.2:20). At the risk of repeating myself, let me repeat myself. If you have given your life to Jesus, Jesus has given Himself to you! He has moved in and unpacked His bags and is ready to change you *"into His likeness from one degree of glory to another"* (2 Cor. 3:18). Paul explains it with these words: *"Strange as it seems, we Christians actually do have within us a portion of the very thoughts and mind of Christ"* (1 Cor. 2:16 TLB).

*Strange* is the word! If I have the mind of Jesus, why do I still think so much like me? If I have the heart of Christ, why do I still have my own hang-ups? If Jesus dwells within me, why do I still hate traffic jams with a passion? Part of the answer is illustrated in a story about a lady who had a small house on the seashore of Ireland at the turn of the last century. She was quite wealthy but also very frugal (tight we might say). The people were surprised, then, when she decided to be among the first to have electricity in her home. Two months after the installation, a meter reader appeared at her door. He asked if her electricity was working well, and she assured him it was.

*"I'm wondering if you can explain something to me,"* he said. *"Your meter shows scarcely any usage. Are you using your power?"*

*"Certainly,"* she answered. *"Each evening when the sun sets, I turn on my lights just long enough to light my candles; then I turn them off."*

She's tapped into the power but she doesn't use it. Her house is connected but not altered. Don't we make the same mistake? We, too - with our souls saved but our hearts unchanged - are connected but not altered. Trusting Christ for salvation but resisting transformation. We occasionally flip the switch, but most of the time we settle for shadows and darkness. What would happen if we left the light on? What would happen if we not only flipped the switch but lived in the light? What changes would occur if we set about the task of dwelling in the radiance of Christ? No doubt about it: God has ambitious plans for us. The same one who saved your soul longs to rebuild your heart.

His plan is nothing short of a total transformation: *“He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love Him along the same lines as the life of His Son”* (Rom. 8:29 MSG).

*“You have begun to live the new life, in which you are being made new and are becoming like the One who made you. This new life brings you the true knowledge of God”* (Col. 3:10).

God is willing to change us into the likeness of Jesus. Shall we accept His offer? Here is my suggestion. Let's imagine what it means to be just like Jesus. Over this coming week I want us all to look into the heart of Christ and spend some time pondering His compassion, reflecting upon His intimacy with the Father, admiring His focus, pondering His endurance. How did He forgive? When did He pray? What made Him so attractive He always drew a crowd? Why didn't He give up when almost everyone deserted Him?

I think this is what the writer of Hebrews meant when he said we should, *“fix our eyes on Jesus”* (Heb. 12:2). The more we do that, the more we will see the promise of who we are becoming in Him. I am sure that verse was uppermost in the mind of Helen Lemmel in 1922 when she penned the words we know so well and have sung so often:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus  
Look full in His wonderful face  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of His glory and grace.*