

The Impassioned Heart:

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

25And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" **26**He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" **27**And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." **28**And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

29But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" **30**Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. **31**Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. **32**So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. **33**But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. **34**He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. **35**And the next day he took out two denarii^[a] and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, "Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back." **36**Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" **37**He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Introduction:

This morning's sermon is entitled "The Impassioned Heart" In order to introduce the theme, I would like us to read again the first verse of "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring".

*Jesu joy of man's desiring
Holy wisdom love most bright
Drawn by Thee our soul's aspiring
Soar to uncreated light
Word of God our flesh that fashioned
With the fire of life impassioned
Striving still to truth unknown
Soaring singing round Thy throne*

These words capture something that is essential to the Christian life. We all have longings of the heart that look for fulfillment. When I speak of the heart here, I am not speaking of the physical organ that supplies blood to the body. No, I am speaking about that part of the human being that is the very essence of our inner self. It is what the Bible understands as our spiritual centre. It is not something we can locate anatomically because the heart is invisible. It is associated with our emotions, our drives, our motives. When a person is heartless we mean by this that they are either, cruel, lifeless, and in some cases even both.

When the hymn announces: “Jesu joy of man’s desiring” these words express the idea that until our heart finds it’s fulfillment in Jesus we will be restless. Now the hymn makes clear, that while we live in this world the heart will never be fully satisfied, and so we continue to strive toward truth unknown. The Bible teaches us that this is a satisfaction that will only be fully met in eternity. The Christian believes that while we live in this world, we are still striving to know more of the truth of who Jesus is and who we are in Him.

And yet while there is much that still makes the heart long for more of Jesus, the impassioned heart, even in the present, is able to sing:

*Holy wisdom love most bright
Drawn by Thee our souls aspiring
Soar to uncreated light
Word of God our flesh that fashioned
With the fire of life impassioned*

We know that Jesus is the one in whom there is this most holy wisdom and love most bright. As we come to know Jesus more fully, our souls have as their ambition to be drawn ever more into the presence of Jesus. As we live in his presence, not only do we then understand what it means to say that he has fashioned our flesh; even more so, he kindles a fire in our heart. This is a fire that creates a flame that is referred to as the “life impassioned.”

I am stirred by the image of the life impassioned. In 185 AD an early Christian leader St. Irenaeus said: “Man Fully Alive is the Glory of God”¹

To be fully alive involves an impassioned heart. Someone who is impassioned is moved by the Holy Spirit and lives with purpose and conviction. As I will teach you now:

- 1. But there is need for caution: To know the Bible is not enough.**
- 2. What we need is a combustible heart.**
- 3. For there is a difference between a religious life and a godly life.**

¹ St. Irenaeus; Against Heresies

4. This is made clear in the story of the Good Samaritan who challenges us to be godly like him and thus good and do likewise.

1. But there is need for caution: To know the Bible is not enough.

While it is God's desire to kindle this fire in our heart there is a problem with the heart, our spiritual centre. We see this represented by the lawyer in our story. Here is a religious man who knows his bible. But while he knows the words, they are so to speak, nothing more than a stack of kindling that has not been ignited. Kindling is fine, but it only serves its purpose if a flame is set to it. The same is true with Holy Scripture. Unless there is lit within us with the flame of God's empowering presence, the book remains nothing more than a collection of pages that give off no heat.

There is a danger for those of us who are religious people. We can hear the bible but not be moved by what we read. This lawyer, we are told, wanted to have an abstract conversation with Jesus. He wanted to keep things in the realm of ideas. The intention of this conversation was not that he would be ignited with the fire of the life impassioned. No this lawyer was trying to test Jesus. Why did he want to do this? Was he perhaps threatened by Jesus' impassioned heart? We will never know for sure but this would not surprise me. There is a tendency for religious professionals to be threatened by those who don't seem to have the right credentials but are on fire for the Lord.

We also cannot be sure if he was all that interested in knowing about eternal life. Perhaps he had heard Jesus speak on this theme before and was troubled by what he had heard and wanted to try to trap him in some sort of theological argument.

Jesus interestingly does not answer his question. Rather he turns to tables on this man with a question of his own:

"What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"

Do you notice that Jesus does not say directly anything about eternal life? Rather he points this man to the Scripture for indeed this is where the answer, or answers about eternal life are to be found. We will see, even though this lawyer knows the right answer, it does not mean he will live by what he knows. The text goes on to tell us at verse 27:

The lawyer answered: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and

your neighbor as yourself." **28** And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

Here is the rub. Yes, the man was able to answer correctly. But to live according to what he knew, well this was another thing. And so to further avoid having to really deal with this text in his own life, Luke tells us that next the lawyer tried to justify himself by asking "Who is my neighbour?"

Do you see this man? Is this someone who has an impassioned heart? Is this a man fully alive living to the glory of God? No here is a man who wants to play it safe. He wants just enough religion in his life to have some assurance of eternal life and feel good about himself, make a living, but live for God, I don't think so.

Here is the thing my brothers and sisters. We can be religious like this lawyer. But such religiosity is like that pile of unlit kindling that is so damp that it is non-combustible. It can give warmth to no one and makes no difference because it cannot respond to the fire of the Father's love.

Yes there is need for caution, to know the Bible is not enough.

2. What we need is a combustible heart.

In Ezekial 36:26 are found these words:

26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Here is a heart that can respond to the Father's love. A combustible heart is a heart of flesh. A heart that in the words of Jesu Joy sings: "I am Striving still to truth unknown. Soaring singing round Thy throne." The combustible heart is a heart that yearns and longs for more of Jesus. O how I want this heart more and how as your pastor and preacher of God's word, I want this for you.

But notice please the pronoun used here. The one speaking is God. He says "I will give you a new heart." I am the one who can make your heart combustible. Yes, anyone can live a religious life with that old hard heart. But to have a heart of flesh, a combustible heart, this is another matter. This is something that requires a spiritual heart transplant that can only be given to us by Jesus.

For here is the thing beloved, the heart that is spoken of here in Ezekial is none other than the heart of Jesus Christ. When we are born a new by the Spirit of God, as we confess a living faith in Jesus Christ we are given such a

heart. What a gift it is to have this heart that burns with love for Jesus and love for our neighbour.

So how would you describe your heart today?

Is it combustible?

Are you living a religious life?

Are you going through the motions but are as wet as a stack of kindling left out in a June storm?

Or is your heart impassioned with a love for God that overflows in how you live in relation to other people?

Dear friends, God's word is clear about this. He is looking for Christians with combustible hearts.

What does such a person look like you ask? Well let us see what the Bible says in answering this question.

A combustible heart is one that stirs when it understands these words that declare: "we are to love the Lord with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind and all of our strength" Such a heart recognizes that this is a staggering call on the life of the Christian. The whole of our being is to be caught up in loving God, for only when we live like this can we say that I am a man or woman fully alive.

The Scripture in both testaments makes clear that we cannot separate this love of God from how we love our neighbour. In fact the very question the lawyer asks: Who is my neighbour? Jesus turns around and says "To whom will you act as neighbour? This is not the first time such a question was asked.

Back at the time of Moses when the Lord God of Israel gave the Law to the people He declared in Deuteronomy 6:4-6:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

⁶And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

Do you hear what this text is saying? God is one, he is undivided, his motives and purposes are clear. James 1:17 puts it this way:

¹⁷Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

What a thought. We can put this thought another way by saying: "There is nothing deceitful in God, nothing two-faced, nothing fickle." To say that we are to love God with all of our heart, all of our soul and all of our strength is to be fully alive. And if being fully alive is the glory of God do you hear what this means? To love God this way means that we are learning to live like God. The text from Deuteronomy makes this absolutely clear when at verse 6 we read: "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart."

Do you see what this is saying? These are not words to be lightly considered or discussed in abstraction. When we allow these words to touch our heart, we are becoming combustible. The heart is ready to be touched with the fire of God's love. Such a fire will not only involve our loving God but will involve our responding to our neighbour.

You will notice that in summarizing the Law, the Lawyer also said "We are to love our neighbour as we do ourselves."

Now this is not from Deuteronomy 6. Rather this is taken from Leviticus where in chapter 19:17 we read:

17 "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Now this is the conclusion of a longer passage Iris read today that declares negatively how we are not to treat our neighbours. After giving the prohibitions, the last two of which are found in verse 17 and 18, the command ends with a positive statement. You shall love your neighbour as yourself." But notice that it does not end there. We are to live this way because the one who is giving the command is the Lord. And because we know that in the Lord there is nothing deceitful, nothing two-faced or fickle about him, we are to live in the same way.

Now it is not only the Old Testament that teaches this. Two more texts from the New Testament say the same thing:

In James 2:14-16 we read:

14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Then we read in 1 Timothy 5:8:

8But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Do you hear what these texts are all saying? A combustible heart will not only be filled with love toward God but will express that love in practical ways toward our neighbour.

And so I ask you again.

Is your heart wet and unresponsive to the fire of the Holy Spirit?

Perhaps tinder dry and waiting to be lit?

Or yes indeed you say, my heart already on fire.

So we have understood so far:

To know the Bible is not enough.
What we need is a combustible heart.

This brings me to my third point which is:

There is a difference between a religious life and a godly life.

This is the warning of the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Here we have presented a priest and a Levite, two very religious men. They were on the way to the Temple in Jerusalem when they come across this man who has fallen into the hands of robbers. But their religious practices eclipse the call to care for the one whose need is real and right there before them. Jesus says that in both cases, upon seeing the man they crossed the street. Perhaps they wanted to avoid him. But I think they thought “my religious obligation in Jerusalem needs to take precedent over assisting this man.” They were not at all moved by his plight but were caught up with their religious duty.

But then here comes a Samaritan. Now for those of you who don't know anything about the Samaritans, the rivalry between Calgary and Edmonton is nothing when compared to that between Jerusalem and Samaria. The Jews despised the Samaritans, considering them a godless and hopeless case. It is like the Jewish/Palestinian conflict today. And yet here in the story listen to how Jesus describes this “godless man”.

33 But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.

Notice the word Jesus uses to describe his reaction. He had compassion. Compassion is a heart word. It is an emotion experienced by those who have a combustible heart. For as the Samaritan saw the traveler suffering from the brigands' beating, his heart went out to him.

As a Samaritan this man would have known the first five books of the Old Testament. These were the only books of the Old Testament that the Samaritans believed had authority. And here is a man, a "godless" Samaritan of all people who embodied in his life what the Law taught in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. His reading of the word connected his head and his heart.

He was willing to reach out and help a man who would have been a Jew. The Priest and Levite, who were Jewish, ignored one of their own. But this despised foreigner proved to be neighbourly, as he saw one of his societal foes, not as an enemy, but a neighbour.

Oh there is irony in this story. Enter Priest and Levite. Religious to the nth degree. Enter the Samaritan. Here is someone whose heart is burning with the fire of God's love. Here is one with a combustible heart. Here is one with an impassioned heart.

- **4. To really hear this story means that we will go and do likewise.**

As Jesus said to the lawyer, so he says to you and me. If you have really heard this story, don't let it pass you by unchanged. If you get what I am after, if you have heard this word today I am placing this challenge before you. "You are to go and do likewise."

But here is the problem, we live in an age where we have been so conditioned to be self serving and self satisfied that this challenge can sound to us like a foreign language. Let me illustrate in verse the challenge:

In the dim and distant past
 When life's tempo wasn't fast,
 Grandma used to rock and knit,
 Crochet, tat, and chat.
 When the kids were in a jam,

They could always count on Gram.

In an age of gracious living,

Grandma was the gal for giving.

Grandma now is at the gym

Exercising to keep slim.

She's off touring with a bunch,

Taking clients out to lunch.

Driving north to ski or curl,

All her days are in a whirl.

Nothing seems to stop or block her,

Now that Grandma's off her rocker.²

To truly be a neighbour be it to our grandchildren, friends or yes even strangers requires time. I know that in my own life I am all too often more like the Priest and Levite. I have important things to do or so I think, but in my busyness I can be very religious but at times not so Christ-like.

To be neighbourly as the Lord asks us to does not mean we have to do big things. It is to be moved with the heart of Jesus in the everyday things. But such neighbourly love will be sacrificial. It requires time, money and our very lives.

Now we do not have a Jericho road where people are being robbed today and so our context will look very different from what this man faced as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. So who is our neighbour today?

Let me suggest some things to you. The person in the ditch is the girl robbed of her husband by another woman. That person is the child robbed of her father by her father's secretary or close family friend. It is the college kid robbed of his faith by profs who scoff at the notion of truth and dismiss Jesus as yesterday's news. It is the teenager robbed of her virginity by her high school date, or the woman robbed of her reputation by malicious gossip. So is the old person robbed of health by disease. So is the child robbed by an

² From a sermon: "**Loving God With All Your Heart**" by *Jill Brisco*.
<http://www.preachingtoday.com/30403>

absentee parent. It is the neighbour robbed of the Gospel of Grace by the paganism of the New Age Movement. The child, now an adult who grieves of her robbed innocence when abused as a child and teen by her father or other relative. There are plenty of people in the ditch, but not nearly enough Good Samaritans to go around.

So let us pray that each one of us can be attentive to see the person in the ditch to whom we are called to come along side. As you have heard me preach this morning, maybe you can say I see where in my life I am acting as this Samaritan. Praise the Lord. May God's grace be with you as you continue to offer sacrificial care and love. Perhaps as you have heard me preach this morning you have been convicted in your heart and you have to admit I have been compassionless and I run from need when I see it, under the guise of countless good excuses.

Where ever we find ourselves today let us remember this. As we live an impassioned life we will be stretched and challenged to live in such a way that the God we love with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind and all of our strength is changing us. Such a faith is not some abstraction discussed in the realm of ideas as the lawyer wanted to do. Rather it is life lived between Jerusalem and Jericho where we are learning to see with the eyes of the Samaritan and so do likewise.

Such a man, such a woman is one whose heart is impassioned, combustible and burning with the loving fire of Jesus' love. Such a man or woman knows what Irenaeus meant when he said "A man or woman fully alive is the glory of God."

