

1Kings 8:22-40

Knowing the Plagues of Our Hearts

Which shall know every man the plague of his own heart – v. 38

This portion of 1Kings reveals to us the nation of Israel at its peak. This is the high point of the history of the nation. The borders were secured; The nation was united; Soon the nation would be prospering as never before and a magnificent temple had just been built. The occasion for our text is the dedication of that temple. *So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the LORD – we read in v. 63.*

I find it interesting that in his dedication prayer, the wisest of all the kings looks ahead. That in itself isn't so unusual – that is very often what rulers do. You would think, however, that he would look ahead to anticipate and pray for Israel's continuing prosperity and dominion. Isn't this what rulers do? They glory in their kingdoms and think in terms of prolonging their dynasties.

Solomon's prayer of dedication even though it was given during a time of peace and prosperity looks ahead – but with a different kind of anticipation. The king is anticipating times of defeat in battle. The king is anticipating times of drought and famine. And the reason that king Solomon anticipates these things is because he also anticipates sin and the need for forgiveness. *When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned – v. 33; When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee – v. 35; If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not,) – v. 46.*

Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place (v. 39) and forgive. This is his repeated refrain throughout his prayer.

- *When thou hearest forgive – v 30*
- *Then hear thou in heaven and forgive the sin of thy people Israel – v 34*
- *Then hear thou in heaven and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel – v 36.*
- *And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee – v 50.*

In the course of his prayer we find Solomon anticipating the need for corporate forgiveness for the entire nation and we find him anticipating the need for individual forgiveness on a personal level for each inhabitant of the nation. Both of these ideas come together in v. 38 – *What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel.* And so we're taught to acknowledge that there are national sins and there are personal sins. And it stands that we need forgiveness on a national level and on a personal level.

Now it might seem on the surface of it, then, that king Solomon was something of a pessimist. Here is the nation of Israel at its peak. Here is the dedication of a magnificent

temple. Here is a joyous occasion in which the glory of God fills the house and a feast is held for 14 days. Why such a seemingly bleak outlook on the future? How does such a negative theme find such a prominent place in Solomon's prayer especially on such a glorious occasion?

It certainly appears, doesn't it, that the wisest of kings had insight into the hearts of men. On the other hand – it doesn't really take the wisdom of Solomon for any of us to know our sin – our constant sin and our continual need for forgiveness of our sins. Look again at the words of v. 38 – *What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart...* Do you see what he's saying? Every man shall know the plague of his own heart. You don't need any assistance in knowing such a plague – you will know it – you do know it. If you don't know it then it's a sure indication that your plague is more serious than you realize. It doesn't take a prolonged series of counseling sessions to get to the bottom of the issue heart plagues. Our text tells us that *every man shall know the plague of his own heart.*

Do you see how personal the matter becomes? The text doesn't tell you that each man knows the plague of another man's heart. In our pride we sometimes like to believe that we can see the sins and faults of others and then flatter ourselves into believing that others couldn't possibly see fault in us. This is but a symptom of a heart plague – the plague of pride and the plague of blindness.

This issue of heart plagues is an appropriate one to raise around the Lord's table for it's here especially that we're called upon to *know every man the plague of his own heart.* This aligns itself with Paul's admonition that a man should examine himself when it comes to his time around the Lord's table. *For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged* – 1Cor. 11:31. And in the course of that examination or judgment we're called upon to know our heart plagues so that we may deal with them based on the truth of Christ's broken body and shed blood. It is here around the table of the Lord that we find the cure for our heart plagues.

So I want to focus on this theme today – the theme of :

Knowing Every Man the Plague of His Own Heart

And for a few moments in preparation for our time around the Lord's table I want to draw your attention to some of the reasons why we must know the plagues of our own hearts. We must know these plagues first of all:

I. Because of the Ill Effect of Such Plagues

There is a general sense, of course, in which we all suffer from the heart plague that springs from our inherent enmity against God or from our depravity. From this general plague can spring countless individual plagues. Like tornadoes that spin off a hurricane so do particular heart plagues spin off the general plague of our depravity.

It would take too long to run down even a fraction of them. There's too many to list. Generally speaking we're talking about such things as covetousness and unbelief. We're considering such things as multitudes of carnal lusts or the over burdening cares about worldly things. We're contemplating selfishness and pride or where pride has been abated we may be talking about a plague that replaces it – the heart plague of self-pity.

These plagues are dangerous because of their ill effects. They leave us spiritually sick. They create the same kind of lethargy that afflicts a man physically who's too sick to get out of bed. And these plagues are deceitful. We know this because we're told in Jer 17:9 that *The heart [is] deceitful above all [things], and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

A 19th century preacher and theologian, Hugh Martin, writes regarding the deceitfulness of such plagues of sin that we should *consider how plausibly does it (sin) represent itself in false colors; so that the covetous man appears in his own eyes to be merely prudent and cautious, sloth puts itself forward as claiming merely what is due to reasonable relaxation, worldly-mindedness shields itself beneath the obligations of a lawful calling, uncharitable suspicion passes itself off as powerful penetration, and moral blindness as the charity that thinketh no evil; while reckless passion calls itself righteous indignation, and conformity to the world pretends to be merely softening down the asperities which religion should not present to others.* I must admit that when I read Hugh Martin's sermon on heart plagues I felt not that I was reading but that I was being read by the Spirit of God.

And we need to know our hearts as best we can. We need to learn to loathe the heart plagues that infect us. If we remain indifferent to them – if we simply learn to accept or tolerate or treat them as if they're not serious then the ill effect upon our souls will spread and our spiritual condition will grow from bad to worse.

Again the words of Hugh Martin: *A heart plague, in so far as it prevails, makes you unlike God. To that extent it defaces, mars and rejects his blessed image. It counteracts and transgresses the law of God. It thwarts the design of Christ's work which is to redeem you from all iniquity and purify you wholly unto God.* Do you feel like Hugh Martin's sermon is reading you?

He becomes even more pointed and convicting when he continues: *A heart plague uncured grieves the Spirit of God, weakens you in your communion with God, hinders you in prayer, makes you averse from God's holy fellowship, and hides the light of his countenance from you.* I wonder how many of you are being described by this sermon? I wonder how many must sadly acknowledge that their communion with God is weak at best and that you grow indifferent towards holy fellowship with Him? You're suffering from a heart plague that has brought you to that condition of cold and careless indifference to the things of God.

This is why such heart plagues must be searched out and dealt with. The effects are deadening to your spiritual life. Hugh Martin continues: *It hinders you also in your work, to which you address yourself with the conscious weakness of a sick man and with a lethargy which promises no valuable result, withholds from you all encouragement, and*

tends also to confirm and strengthen and perpetuate itself. It leaves you open to Satan, for every heart plague is just a weak point at which Satan has you at advantage, a handle by which Satan can hold you and use you in his service.

Basically Hugh Martin is describing a person whose heart plague has cost him all his spiritual sensitivity. He's lethargic toward spiritual things. He receives little assurance or comfort from the Bible but to make matters worse – he doesn't even seem to care. He more or less comes to accept his dead and unfeeling heart toward the things of God as the norm for his religion. It's as if he suffers spiritually what a man suffers physically who is afflicted with a heart stroke. He's paralyzed and has lost much of his spiritual feelings. And so he becomes woefully negligent in his spiritual duties and occupies himself instead with worldly endeavors and entertainment.

What an awful condition to find yourself in. How dishonoring to God and to Christ! Hugh Martin is right. It thwarts the purpose of a loving God and a dying Savior in redemption. These plagues of the heart must be faced – they must be recognized – they must be viewed and treated as the spiritual sicknesses that they truly are – whether they manifest themselves as covetousness, or pride, or self-pity, or worldly wanderings, or carnal lusts, or unbelief – these plagues must be diagnosed and treated. The worst thing about these heart plagues is that they weaken and kill a Christian's desire for Christ.

And so this is your task to perform Christian – *Every man shall know the plague of his own heart* our text tells us. It's your solemn duty to know it and deal with it. The responsibility falls upon you to search it out. The Lord can and will aid you in the work provided you call upon Him. Isn't this what the Psalmist does when he calls upon God in Ps. 139:23,24 *Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

The Lord's table calls us to heart searching. The Lord's table should serve to not only stir us to examine our hearts but it should serve us to apply the remedy of Christ to any and every plague of our hearts. And this leads to our next consideration from the text for not only must we know every man the plague of his own heart because of the ill effects of those plagues but we must know them:

II. So That We'll Pursue the Cure for These Plagues –

Why does Solomon bother to mention these heart plagues? Why does he say *which shall know every man the plague of his own heart*? We see from the text that it's in the context of prayer that Solomon makes this statement. *What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel* and then there follows the words of our text *which shall know every man the plague of his own heart* and then Solomon follows these words with more about prayer *which shall know every man the plague of his own heart and spread forth his hands toward this house.*

This newly erected temple would now be the place of the altar. It would be the place of the sacrifices. We read in v. 62 *And the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice*

before the LORD. And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the LORD, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the LORD.

Do you see how dedication is grounded in sacrifice? It wouldn't do for the Israelites to simply dedicate themselves to the Lord. Heart plagues will never be cured that are not based on the right covenant. And dedication apart from the right sacrifice amounts to no more than a feeble attempt to meet the requirements of the covenant of works.

Solomon certainly knew better. I've heard it suggested that Solomon prayed his prayer and pronounced his blessing to the Israelites from the raised platform of the altar. He's grounding his petitions for forgiveness on the sacrifice of the altar. His hope for forgiveness for the nation and for the individuals of the nation was grounded in what the burnt offering stood for and what the sin offering stood for and what the peace offering and the trespass offerings stood for.

And we know today with even greater clarity and fullness that those offerings were designed to point us to Christ. Our hope for forgiveness and power to overcome is grounded in Him. He is our burnt offering because He's the propitiation for our sins. He is our sin offering for *He that knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him* (2Cor. 5:21). And He is our peace offering because *being justified by faith we have peace with God* (Rom. 5:1).

The key, then, to knowing our heart plagues with the aim to overcoming them is that we stand fast in the covenant of grace. Again Hugh Martin notes: *no heart plague can be cured unless you take your position decidedly within the covenant of grace and act upon its constitution and arrangements. If your heart plague is to be cured, or your besetting sin mortified, it is absolutely indispensable, it is the great and indispensable preliminary, that you should be under the covenant of grace and observe its order and provision.*

Remember the benefits to the covenant of grace. It is this covenant that *removes your condemnation, delivering you from the curse of the law and the wrath which is to come. ... It throws wide open the doors of your prison and brings you forth into the sweet light of day, into the freedom that belongs to the soul and that refers to eternity. ... It says with great decision, explicitness and authority, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace'.*

“It defends you from Satan, answering and repelling all his accusations through the righteousness and intercession of an all-prevailing Advocate, and putting you in a position to repel also all his temptations and assaults in divine strength. It removes all that was fitted to strengthen sin, for it removes that paralyzing sense of guilt upon the conscience, in the face of which no man ever truly set himself to serve the living God or to cure his heart of evil. It condemns sin in the flesh, it dethrones the old man, weakens him, saps and mines his citadels and is mighty through God to the pulling down of his strongholds.

It reveals holiness in its true beauty and loveliness as seen in the character, and especially the death, the loving death, of a Friend and Elder Brother. It plucks off the mask of sin...It

provides you in this work with a loving, compassionate, considerate, faithful and unchangeable Companion and High Priest, even one who, in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, is able to succour them that are tempted. It provides and secures God's affectionate and fatherly acceptance of your sincere though imperfect efforts after holiness, and all these and many other glorious advantages it crowns with the final assurance that perfect victory shall at last reward these efforts, and perfect spotlessness and moral beauty at last shall shine upon you when your whole heart shall be without plague or spot or blemish or any such thing."

Simply put – the solution to heart plagues is to stand fast in the covenant of grace. How often the New Testament calls on us to do just that:

- Rom. 5:2 *By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*
- Gal. 5:1 *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*
- 1Co 16:13 *Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.*

Our time in communion gives us the opportunity to take our stand. As you partake of the bread and the cup you are able to declare to God that you're taking your stand in Christ and in the covenant of His grace. You're pledging your faith in the blood of the everlasting covenant. You're also making your plea for Him to impart to you the enabling grace you need to overcome the plagues of your heart and you're expressing your faith in the promise of His word that your sins are forgiven and they will not have dominion over you. What a glorious opportunity is before us, then, in this time of remembrance. May each one know the plague of his own heart not that he may be driven to despair by such knowledge but that he may in the power of Christ's broken body and shed blood gain the power to prevail. May the Lord make this time a time of effectual heart curing and strengthening.