

The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 17:1-18

Topic

God tells Jeremiah we all have a deceitful heart and that we therefore tend to con ourselves into departing from the Lord

Title

“The Not So Comic-Con”

Introduction

Workplace pranks can be fun... Or they can become deadly.

Joshua Philip Martin, an EMT in Virginia, was found guilty of involuntary manslaughter for zapping a coworker with defibrillator paddles in what turned out to be a deadly prank.

Zapping a beating heart isn't always deadly. Doctors use a technique by which an abnormal heart rate is converted back to a normal rhythm. *Synchronized electrical cardioversion* uses a therapeutic dose of electric current to the beating heart at a specific moment in the cardiac cycle.

In other words, *they zap you to get your heart back in sync.*

This portion of the Book of Jeremiah is like spiritual cardioversion by which God is seeking to get your heart back in sync with His.

Maybe your heart is already in sync with God's. That certainly can be true - at least for a time. But because we still struggle with the flesh, and will until we go to be with Jesus, from time-to-time (sometimes daily!) we need a good jolt to get back in sync.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points:

1. First we will see that God Wants Your Heart To Be In Sync With His, and
2. Second we will ask ourselves, Do You Want Your Heart To Be In Sync With God's?

#1 God Wants Your Heart
To Be In Sync With His
(v1-12)

These first few verses are pretty rough on us. They are going to describe the human heart - your heart and my heart - as constantly *departing* from God and *deceiving* ourselves while we are doing it.

Maybe it will help to first see God's intention in zapping us. We see it in verse twelve where Jeremiah's response to God's spiritual cardioversion is to say, "A glorious high throne from the beginning Is the place of our sanctuary."

The "sanctuary" He's talking about isn't a physical place; it's a spiritual relationship wherein we enjoy peace, security, safety, and love. It has been God's intention from the beginning of creation to be our living sanctuary. He therefore is constantly working to bring our hearts in sync with His.

Billy Graham is credited with coining the phrase, "the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart." There is something very wrong with us in that we are born into this world dead in our trespasses and sins. Even after being born-again, the flesh remains and our hearts are prone to depart from the Lord.

Jeremiah 17:1 "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; With the point of a diamond it is engraved On the tablet of their heart, And on the horns of your altars,
Jeremiah 17:2 While their children remember Their altars and their wooden images By the green trees on the high hills.

Young King Josiah had destroyed all the pagan altars. Afterwards King Jehoiakim had restored them!

God likened the situation to engraving. You probably have some jewelry that is engraved. Maybe it's your wedding ring and it has the name of your beloved or your wedding date. On the outside onlookers see only the ring; inside you carry the meaning of it closer to yourself.

God likened their idolatry to an engraving upon their hearts. Outwardly they still worshipped Him in the Temple but the presence of these other altars and images showed what was really engraved upon their hearts.

Likewise the fact they were teaching their kids to be idolaters revealed where their hearts were focused.

Jeremiah 17:3 O My mountain in the field, I will give as plunder your wealth, all your treasures, And your high places of sin within all your borders.

Jeremiah 17:4 And you, even yourself, Shall let go of your heritage which I gave you; And I will cause you to serve your enemies In the land which you do not know; For you have kindled a fire in My anger which shall burn forever."

In every way He could, by every image He could employ, God was warning Judah of the Babylonian invasion and subsequent captivity. He would not spare Jerusalem or its Temple. Their idolatry must be checked and broken.

Jeremiah 17:5 Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man And makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the LORD.

Trusting in "man" means trusting in yourself rather than in God. You do it whenever you make "flesh [your] strength." The "flesh," in the Bible, refers to your natural bent, your innate tendency, towards pride and self-gratification. Even after you are saved the flesh remains and you are in a life-long struggle against it until you go to be with the Lord.

That struggle against your flesh is here described as a departure from the Lord. Think of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. One minute God was their sanctuary as they met and talked with Him in the cool of the day in their beautiful garden. The next minute, because they chose pride and self-gratification, they departed from Him and, for His part, God had to banish them. Instead of fellowshiping with God in a beautiful garden they had to sweat to till the ground and could only approach God through blood sacrifice.

The next three verses provide a stark contrast:

Jeremiah 17:6 For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, And shall not see when good comes, But shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, In a salt land which is not inhabited.

Jeremiah 17:7 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, And whose hope is the LORD.

Jeremiah 17:8 For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, Which spreads out its roots by the river, And will not fear when heat comes; But its leaf will be green, And will not be anxious in the year of drought, Nor will cease from yielding fruit.

Satan told Adam and Eve they'd be like God if they disobeyed Him. Instead they found themselves in conflict with Him, with each other, and with creation itself.

Whenever I choose to disobey God, to sin, I'm choosing to vacate His sanctuary in favor of a desert. What I think is going to satisfy, to gratify, leaves me hopeless and helpless. I think it's an oasis; it's really a mirage. It may be pleasurable for a time. I may enjoy worldly success. But since I was made to have fellowship with God, I cannot truly be satisfied planted like a shrub in the desert of this world.

The next verse gives us a rather unique insight into the workings of the flesh.

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"

Let's dig in here for a moment. This word "deceitful" is very interesting. This word is used only three times in the Old Testament. It describes a *swelling* and is used of a knoll or small hill. When used in relation to traits of human personality, it describes an inflated, prideful vanity. According to *Strong's Concordance* it also indicates something fraudulent or crooked.

Even more interesting is that it comes from exactly the same root as the proper name Jacob. You might remember how Jacob, in the Old Testament, on two occasions used fraud to get what he wanted. What Jacob twice did to Esau gives a good idea of the practical meaning of "deceitful."

One commentator said, “we might say our heart is always attempting to ‘con’ us into something that is not good for us in any way. Its inducements may indeed appear attractive on the surface, but further examination would reveal that its appeals are fraudulent and risky.”

We have a romantic idea of con artists. Think Paul Newman and Robert Redford in *The Sting*. Or Leonardo DiCaprio in *Catch Me if You Can*.

In reality con artists are more like Bernie Madoff who defrauded thousands of investors out of millions of dollars ruining their lives in the process.

You are, or at least you have in your heart, Bernie Madoff - **not** Paul Newman. But you think it’s Paul Newman and, so, you don’t always take your departing from the Lord seriously.

The person you con... **Is yourself!** And it’s not a romantic comedy when you do; it’s a tragedy *every time* - even if it seems a small con.

Your heart is also “desperately wicked.” One translation of that is *incurable*. It is incurable humanly speaking. We cannot change our hearts or heal them. God must do something to heal and save us.

Jeremiah 17:10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.

Concentrate first on the words, “to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doing.” God wants to reward you. He is always providing opportunities for you to bear fruit - spiritual fruit - with His help and enabling. He comes looking for it, I dare say even hoping for it.

The kind of fruit He is looking for, at least as He stated it here, isn’t what you accomplish. It’s how you respond to life and its circumstances. It’s what He finds in your heart upon a deep and thorough examination. Is your heart really set on God? Are you submitting to His will, walking in His ways, despite the obstacles and difficulties? Or are you conning yourself?

Jeremiah 17:11 "As a partridge that broods but does not hatch, So is he who gets riches, but not by right; It will leave him in the midst of his days, And at his end he will be a fool."

You can't believe how much discussion there is about the accuracy of this proverb regarding partridges! Do they really "brood but not hatch"? Some say "Yes," while others say "No."

It's not important that this statement be scientifically accurate. For example we say, "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Is that statement a scientific reality? Is it mathematically correct? No, but we all understand what it means.

The point of the partridge proverb is that you can approach life one of two ways - yours or God's.

- Your way, when you give in to your flesh, is that of the thieving partridge. What you gather and brood over will never "hatch," will never bring life.
- Or you can go God's way, the "right" way, and be fruitful.

Jeremiah 17:12 A glorious high throne from the beginning Is the place of our sanctuary.

We can claim this because we can put that into New Testament terms:

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

Ephesians 2:6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

The con man within you, the partridge, always suggests there is something better than being in the sanctuary of fellowship with Jesus. That you are missing something. It was a lie in the Garden; it's a lie today.

#2 Do You Want Your Heart
To Be In Sync With God's?
(v13-18)

Jeremiah was told to not marry, to not mourn for the dead, to not attend any feasts as a sign to the Jews of God's coming judgment. No one listened to

Him. Instead people, including those in his home town and in his family, plotted to kill him.

His response was to seek God for sanctuary.

Jeremiah 17:13 O LORD, the hope of Israel, All who forsake You shall be ashamed. "Those who depart from Me Shall be written in the earth, Because they have forsaken the LORD, The fountain of living waters."

Jeremiah turned to the Lord and the Lord immediately responded. Now the Lord didn't change Jeremiah's circumstances. In fact, things would get worse. I think we sometimes fall for the con because we expect God to work in a particular way. If He doesn't, then we label Him a failure and are open to suggestions from our conning heart.

He has promised to be our "fountain of living waters." He has promised to refresh and sustain us spiritually *no matter the circumstances*. Earlier in this book Jeremiah had described the Jews as trying to find substitutes for living waters by hewing out for themselves reservoirs, called "cisterns," that could hold no water. The con always sells us on a broken cistern. It's like buying the Brooklyn Bridge!

Jeremiah 17:14 Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; Save me, and I shall be saved, For You are my praise.

If you are a believer, do you still need to be healed and saved? This is Jeremiah's response to verse nine. Remember we said the heart, in its natural condition, was incurably wicked.

- We need to be healed whenever our hearts are discovered to be out of sync. We need a good zap from the Lord.
- We need to be saved and then go on being saved in the sense of daily trusting in the Lord until we are ultimately saved when we go to be with Him.

"For you are my praise." Can I praise God in the storm? In the tragedy? Even when I can't understand what He is doing, or why He doesn't do something different? Yes, yes I can. But it's a choice I must make.

Jeremiah 17:15 Indeed they say to me, "Where is the word of the LORD? Let it come now!"

It would seem that one of the criticisms leveled against Jeremiah was that the judgment he was warning about hadn't come. It's a common objection even today to say that God is never going to judge the earth. The apostle Peter describes it in his letters, saying that scoffers say, "Where is the promise of His coming?"

We can give this a broader, more general application. It can be hard to hold on to the promises of God when things seem to be crumbling around you. You don't need a scoffer to say, "Where is the Word of the Lord?" *because you ask it of yourself!*

The 'answer' is to go on serving the Lord even if you get no answer:

Jeremiah 17:16 As for me, I have not hurried away from being a shepherd who follows You, Nor have I desired the woeful day; You know what came out of my lips; It was right there before You.

Jeremiah didn't really like the message he was told to deliver. He probably wouldn't have chosen to live at that time if it was left up to him. Nevertheless he kept on serving the Lord, giving out the Word.

Jeremiah 17:17 Do not be a terror to me; You are my hope in the day of doom.

Jeremiah 17:18 Let them be ashamed who persecute me, But do not let me be put to shame; Let them be dismayed, But do not let me be dismayed. Bring on them the day of doom, And destroy them with double destruction!

Jeremiah was predicting "the day of doom" for Judah. As much as he believed and trusted God, he still needed encouragement that God would be his "hope" when Jerusalem's walls fell and its Temple was on fire.

We all put on a good front but I think there are times when, if we would be honest, we are terrified of life and whether or not God is going to be sufficient for us in the spiritual conflicts. Since I can't know He will be until I get to the end, I must look at the lives of believers who have gone before me. Like the men and women of faith in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews.

God came through for each of them - even when His coming through was their martyrdom.

Which brings us back to the question I asked in this section, Do I want my heart to be in sync with God's heart?

All of us who are believers would answer, "Yes!" We need to continue to answer "Yes" through all of our trials and tribulations, listening for God, looking to Him, rather than conning ourselves and approaching life as a thieving partridge.

When I used to scuba dive I was told there was always the possibility of becoming disoriented underwater; of not knowing which way was up and which way was down. It's a serious, life-threatening problem!

If you become disoriented you are to follow your bubbles because they always rise towards the surface.

All of us become disoriented in our walk with the Lord. The devil uses the world to appeal to our flesh to disorient us.

God's Word can always lead us 'up' to the heavenlies if we will trust in Him and in it more than our deceitful hearts.