

# TAKEN HOLD BY THE HEART

Peter Hay, prepared for the Presbytery fellowship word, 12 December 2021

Transcription of recording, slightly edited

## Introduction

Hello, everyone. In our last Bible study, we considered the issue of idolatry, which the Lord addresses in our lives as we heed the word of His messengers, and then 'look on Him whom we have pierced'.

One of the key verses that we noted was from the prophetic writings of Ezekiel where he said, 'Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols, that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart, because they are all estranged from Me by their idols.' Eze 14:4-5.

We noted that this passage reveals the significant, and very helpful point, that 'an idol in the heart' is *iniquity*. Iniquity is where we reject the word of the Lord which defines the will of God for our lives as a son of God; and walk instead by the sight of our own eyes, and by the dictates of our own heart.

## The Lord seeks to seize us by the heart, for sonship or damnation

This passage also highlights the fact that the Lord comes to us with His word because He desires to take hold of us by the heart.

What did the Lord mean by this statement: 'That I may [take, or] seize, the house of Israel by their heart'?

There are two implications of this initiative. One is that of a person's *recovery to their predestination as a son of God*, in fellowship with Yahweh.

The other is a person's *eternal damnation*.

These two implications are not surprising for us, as we have come to understand that the word of the cross is 'a two-edged sword'.

Today, we will understand how that word works in relation to idolatry and iniquity, so that the Lord can 'establish us in our obedience'. The same action of that word takes us by the heart to 'take us out from His presence'.

## The dual effect of the word as a sword

That principle applies to the whole world. It is the same word that comes to *every person*, and every person can respond to it.

We will understand how that word takes hold of us by the heart. The point is that when the word does this, it achieves what the Lord has sent the word for. Through Isaiah, the Lord said, 'So shall My word that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.' Isa 55:11.

The key point is that it is not that the Lord said, 'I want this person to go to hell, and I want that person to go to heaven.' Rather, when the Lord speaks, both those implications are included in His one word.

The effect of His word upon us depends on how we *receive* it, so it will have one of those two effects for each person.

The one word from the Lord brings about both responses. He gives us the dignity and accountability to choose in relation to our interface with the word. That is an implication of the prevenient grace of God.

## Called to repentance and obedience

We do need to understand both sides of the cross, both sides of the sword of His word, for the sake of interfacing with it so that we are *gathered* in.

The Lord comes to take us by the heart by calling us to repentance, and by proclaiming the obedience of our sonship. This is an important point.

Inherent in this command is the faith that is necessary to turn from our self-centeredness, which is iniquity, so that we obey, from the heart, the 'form of doctrine to which [we have been] delivered'. Rom 6: 17.

The word comes and *grants faith* to a hearer so that they can *respond in obedience* to that word.

For that to happen, it must make a breach on our heart. We must be delivered from slavery to sin, which is our iniquity, because iniquity is where we live by the sight of our own eyes, and the

dictates of our own heart. Iniquity keeps us in bondage to the law of sin and death.

### **A doctrine that did not come from within us**

Where we are delivered from iniquity, it is not that we then choose how will live. We are set free from that and, by faith, we are 'delivered to a form of doctrine' to which we become *obedient from the heart*.

The word must make a breach on our heart. We must lay hold of the faith that comes in that word.

The evidence that we are being delivered from iniquity, or idolatry, is that we are becoming obedient to a form of doctrine that we have not chosen, but are *delivered to*.

### **Authority**

We are 'under authority'. When we are under authority, we obtain faith, which is the authority to exercise our name. by offering in fellowship.

Inherent in the command is the faith that is necessary to turn us from our self-centeredness, or iniquity, 'to obey from the heart the form of doctrine to which we have been delivered'.

We can obey in this manner because we are being delivered from slavery to sin, which is a life lived according to one's own sight and the dictates of our wicked and deceitful hearts.

### **Obedience delivers us to our walk in the offering of Christ**

The word is the word of Christ which is ministered by His messengers. It is the word that grants faith for our daily participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ. Becoming obedient from the heart delivers us to our daily participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

As we journey with Him, we learn the obedience that He learned through the things which He suffered. In this fellowship, we are delivered from the flesh, and can fulfil the will of God by doing the works that belong to our sonship.

Christ takes hold of us by the heart so that we become obedient from the heart to a form of doctrine, which is the doctrine of baptism. Baptism is our participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

### **Becoming blind and deaf to His word**

However, if we reject that very word proclaimed by God's messengers and, instead, misappropriate the word, and even try to misappropriate the fellowship of the body of Christ to our own end, we will become progressively deaf and blind to what the Lord is saying to the church through His messengers.

In other words, we will hear, naturally, what is said, because we have natural ears, but we will be unable to hear what *the Spirit is saying to the church*.

### **The Lord leaves us to the dictates of our heart**

This is an amazing principle! As the word comes, if we reject it, the Lord gives us over to the dictates of our heart and to the blindness of our own sight. We will then hear the word, but we will not hear what the Spirit says.

The more the word comes, the more we will think that our perception is true; but we are being bound to our delusion.

This is a great and terrifying judgement, because the Lord begins to answer us through our idols. That is what it means when He said that He comes to 'take us by the heart to take us out'.

### **The Lord answers us according to our idols**

The Lord summarised this by saying, 'I will begin to answer them according to the idols in their heart.' Eze 14:4. That is the passage we began with. 'I, the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols.'

What does it mean when the Lord answers us 'according to our idols'? It means that we will become increasingly convinced that our deluded perspective and religious culture is the Lord's direction for our lives when it is the expression of an idol in our heart.

We will not think that we are deluded. We will not think that we are in sin; we will think that we are completely 'on-board'.

The more that we trust in our own understanding, and proceed from the dictates of our heart, the more we will become deluded. This will be evident through all sorts of judgements that we make about ourselves and others. We will be convinced that what we see is what the Spirit is saying, and the way that we are proceeding is the way that He is leading us.

### **The Lord convinces us that our idols are true**

Do you see what happens? The Lord answers us by convincing us that our idols are speaking the truth.

Do you see how terrifying a situation that is? We cannot tell the difference between the truth and a lie. He locks us up to the lie.

### **Idols speak delusion**

This is what Zechariah prophesied. 'For the idols speak delusion.' This is an amazing passage.

If we live by the sight of our own eyes, which we think is true, that is idolatry, and it speaks or affirms to us that our delusion is true.

'The idols speak delusion; the diviners envision lies, and [they] tell false dreams, [and] they comfort in vain.' There can be comfort to assure us that the way that we are walking is true; but it is in vain.

We know that it is vanity, because agitation and fear of death drives us to try to find this assurance.

'Therefore the people wend their way like sheep [which means they go astray]; they are in trouble because they have no shepherd.'

They do not go astray because there are no shepherds; it is because they are *not submitted* to the under-shepherds.

### **Shepherds given by the Lord guard the flock; some will reject His shepherding**

Jesus is the great Shepherd, and He sets under-shepherds, or 'masters of assemblies', over His house. Because they are not submitted to that authority, they have no shepherd, and they are subject to these lying implications.

When a person persistently arbitrates the word and appraises its ministry, they reject the shepherding initiative of the Lord. That is a straightforward point.

Jesus Christ is our great Shepherd. He has set under-shepherds to shepherd His flock. When we judge the word or arbitrate its relevance to us, we will be saying, 'We don't need to be led or fed by that administration.' We reject the shepherding initiative of the Lord through His under-shepherds. Ecc 12:11.

The Lord takes a person by the heart by answering them through the idols of their heart. How is this manifest in people's lives? Often, such

people *draw back from the fellowship of the presbytery* which is with the Father and His Son.

It may not be literally, as in they won't speak to them. However, they separate themselves from that fellowship by *making judgements about it*. They might still talk with people who are in the presbytery, but they constantly arbitrate what is said and the culture that is being communicated.

### **Setting ourselves as judge of the word**

Do you see that if you judge something, you step outside of it to impose a gaze on it? This is withdrawal from relational obedience.

When we make a judgement, our obedience is contingent on whether it accords with us or not.

That is not relational obedience; that is, at best, compliance. Such people have drawn back from relational obedience on the ground of fellowship, yet claim to hear clearly from the Lord Himself.

However, He has given them over to a strong delusion to affirm the idol that they have chosen over the truth. They will remain in darkness and be destroyed. That is the judgement of God upon us because of our religious zeal.

As they withdraw from the context of fellowship in the word, people tend to say, 'Well, I hear so clearly from the Lord.'

So, if you think that you are hearing so clearly from the Lord, but have a problem with your brethren in the fellowship, and particularly in the presbytery, let that be an indicator of your need for repentance, so that you are not locked up in the prison of darkness which leads to destruction.

### **The progressive effect of His word**

Let us look more clearly at how this operation of the word of the cross works.

Jesus Himself said that this would be the *progressive* effect of His word upon those who fail to obtain faith by hearing His message. He made this statement particularly about the parable of 'the sower and the seed.'

This is interesting, because the book, *The Mystery of Godliness*, which we are teaching from now, is based on those four grounds. What Jesus said is very important for us in understanding the implication of how we hear that message.

### **The function of parables**

This is what He said. 'The disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"'

He answered and said to them, "Because it is being given to you to *know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven*, but to them it has not been given.

'For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand'.<sup>1</sup> Mat 13:10-13.

Jesus' statement was a direct quote from the prophet Isaiah who received this condition when he was commissioned as a prophet.

### **The call and preparation of Isaiah**

Isaiah was appointed to this work when he was illuminated to the administration of the throne, and was sanctified to this work of proclamation in the fire of the fellowship of the administration that he saw.

This passage establishes the principle of the word and our response to it.

'In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

'And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.'<sup>2</sup> Isa 6:1-4.

This is awesome, isn't it! It was the throne room scene, where Christ was seated on the throne.

Isaiah responded, 'So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

'Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me." And He said, "Go tell this people: [this is the message that God

gave to Isaiah] 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand'."<sup>3</sup> Isa 6:5-9.

### **Understanding means to become the word**

When we talk about 'understanding', we are talking about 'being established in the culture of the word' that you hear. There is natural hearing, without understanding what the Spirit is saying.

'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing [naturally], but do not perceive [it]. "Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and *understand with their heart* and return and be healed".<sup>4</sup> Isa 6:10. Remember, we are talking about being taken hold of by the *heart*.

Isaiah came with the sword of the word to proclaim judgement upon the people to whom he was sent.

There is much to say about this passage, but I will pick some key points that have to do with where we are in this progression of the way of salvation.

### **Fundamental to every messenger is to begin with 'God is Light'**

Every messenger, every person whom the Lord has called and set apart to this work, must receive the word from the beginning that 'God is Light'. That is exactly what Isaiah saw. He saw the throne; he saw Christ on it. He heard the voice that shook it. Smoke was everywhere; the house was filled with smoke.

A fellowship and an administration were revealed. Every messenger must receive the word from the beginning that God is Light. They must be illuminated to the culture and the order of offering that is fundamental to the fellowship of Yahweh.

A messenger must not only receive theology. We do have to be careful with our theology, but that is not what makes a person a messenger. A messenger is 'beholding a culture'. They are to be *joined to that culture* so that, as they testify, they *join others* to it.

Isaiah understood that. He saw this happen, and instead of saying, 'Great! You are lucky that I am here, I can do that!', the first thing that he said was, 'Woe! I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips'.

'Unclean lips' means that his conversation and conduct was not the same as the message that he

had received; that God is Light. He said, 'I am in darkness, and I am not what is being portrayed to me.'

### **Messengers walking in the light of the word**

Unless a messenger has that moment where they hear the message, then turn, look, see, and are restored to that fellowship, they will be a false messenger.

Every messenger must receive the word from the beginning, that God is Light. That is, they must be *illuminated to the culture and the order of offering* that is fundamental to the fellowship of Yahweh.

Their fellowship as a presbytery cannot be the fellowship of the Father and Son unless they are restored to that way of meeting and relating with one another.

A person who has been illuminated in this manner will fear the Lord and will desire the process in which their iniquity is taken away.

### **The fellowship of offering in the fear of the Lord**

When Isaiah said, 'Woe is me, for I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips', he was saying, 'The way that I live and communicate is a deviation from what I have seen?'

That is iniquity, isn't it? Isaiah feared the Lord instead of presuming to trample on that ground under the premise of the confidence that he had in his idol.

A person who has been illuminated in this manner will fear the Lord and will desire the process through which their iniquity is taken away and their sin is purged. Otherwise, they will be unable to proclaim the word that joins others to this very fellowship.

Isaiah had his iniquity removed by a coal taken from the altar. The altar was and is *the context of offering*. It is the fellowship of offering. A coal from the altar was taken to him by a seraph, that touched his lips.

There had to be an interface, or a point of fellowship, where that purging action took place. You cannot be purged of your iniquity outside of 'the fellowship of the altar'. You must come and *walk in the light of the word* that proceeds from that fellowship. That is true for the presbytery, and it is true for everyone who is part of the body of Christ.

### **The authority of the messenger**

Having had his iniquity removed and his sin purged, Isaiah was able to present himself for service according to his sanctification. Until that process happened, it would have been presumptuous of Isaiah to present himself.

When his iniquity was purged, he had the confidence of faith. This is the authority that comes by hearing the word, to be obedient and to say, 'Here I am, send me.' You can say that because you are on the ground where the word comes and the message is proclaimed.

In response to the Lord's query, 'Who shall I send and who will go for us?', Isaiah was able to say, by faith, 'Here I am, send me.' This is beautiful, isn't it? This is 'the feet of him who brings good news'. The feet are 'beautiful' feet because they come from a beautiful ground of fellowship.

Later, the Lord said to Isaiah that, to teach knowledge and to make the hearers of his message understand the message, it had to be proclaimed in a particular way.

He said, 'I am going to send you, and every time you speak, people will become dull of hearing. Every time you address their heart, they will harden it. Every time you speak to their sight, they will go blind.'

### **The ministry of the word in gentleness**

Then the Lord said, 'This is the way your message will come, Isaiah.' He said that to teach knowledge and to make the hearers of His message understand, it will be proclaimed 'precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little'. The effect of this word of the Lord in the life of a hearer would depend upon how it was *received*.

Will you stop for a moment and hear this point? Remember, the word of the cross comes as a *two-edged sword*. We may think of this as being violent. It comes swinging and slashing and thrusting, whatever you do with the sword.

This is the amazing point: *the word of the cross* does *not* come like that!

It comes like gentle rain, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little. As that happens, the two edges of that sword work the purpose for which that word has been sent.

### **The word as the sword of the Spirit**

We must realise that the word will not impact us because of its 'emotive' effect.

It will have an impact on us because it is 'the sword of the Spirit', and it comes in a particular way. It comes as line on line, precept upon precept, which is like gentle rain.

As we will see, the psalmist said that it was 'like the dew of Hermon'. I love that imagery, because it is the water of the word, but it comes down so gently that we only see it in the morning.

### **The word reveals our identity, not a list of things to be done**

We will consider the passage that Isaiah wrote explaining this principle of the word.

'Whom will He teach knowledge? And whom will He make to understand the message? Those just weaned from the milk? Those drawn from the breasts, for precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little there a little.' Isa 28:9-10.

This looks like dot points – one dot point followed by another. And we might say, 'How many dot points do we need to read or need to speak?'

In the end, it is the water that comes either as refreshing and rest to a person; or it causes them to fall backwards.

'For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people.'

Even the communication of the word will not be through eloquent speech. That is not where its adequacy is, or where its 'purchase' is. It will come through the weakness of speech which Paul called 'the foolishness of preaching'.

That does not mean that we do not apply ourselves to speaking clearly. It means that the adequacy of a messenger is not in their presentation.

It is in their *obedience*, and the fact that they are sanctified to their work, so that they can proclaim what the Spirit says. It is an order of authority.

### **Receiving rest and refreshing**

'For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people to whom He said, "This is the rest with which You may cause the weary to rest," and, "This is the refreshing".' Isa 28:11-12.

That is beautiful, isn't it? I love the way that he 'leans on' this word, saying, 'If you will receive the word as it comes this way, *it will give you rest and refreshing.*'

That 'rest' that we obtain is the rest that belongs to someone who is to receive *an inheritance*. It is the rest promised through the 'oath of the Lord'.

It is the rest that He referred to when He said, 'I have sworn.' He swore that there is a 'promise' of entering rest, but it is also the rest that you do not get if you are disobedient. It is the rest that belongs to those who enter the finished work of Christ for them.

'He said, "This is the rest with which You may cause the weary to rest," and, "This is the refreshing"; yet they would not hear. But the word of the Lord was to them, "Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, and there a little".' Isa 28:12-13.

That is the same statement, exactly the same, as the one that He spoke before, where He said, 'Gives rest and refreshing.'

### **The same word brings rest or a snare**

Isaiah was making a point here. It is *one word* from God that causes some to find rest and refreshing.

However, for those who will not hear, 'they might go and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and caught'. It is progressive.

The point is not that you are either *fully obedient*; or you are *fully disobedient* and gone.

It means that every time that the word is proclaimed, it *polarises* those who hear it in a particular way.

For those who hear the message, and thereby receive faith to believe and respond, the word brings them rest and refreshing. As I said before, this is the rest of their inheritance as a son of God.

For those who walk in the light of the word that proceeds in this manner, their fellowship is likened in the Scriptures to 'the dew of Hermon'.

### **The dew of Hermon**

That is a beautiful point spoken of by David.

'Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!'

If the word comes as precept upon precept, etcetera, and is received with faith, it causes a person to find rest and refreshing in the

fellowship of the body of Christ. There is no angst towards that. A person who knows this is illuminated to see that fellowship is the inheritance.

‘Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head.’

This is ‘the oil of grace’ which is ministered through the word.

‘It is like the precious oil upon the head [the headship of Christ], running down the beard, the beard of Aaron [as a priestly action], running down the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing - life forevermore.’ Psa 133:1-3.

### **The dew of Hermon is the word**

The dew of Hermon, where it descended, is the word, which is proclaimed precept upon precept, line upon line, here little, there a little. It ‘commands a blessing’ that is rest and refreshing. A person for whom the word brings rest and refreshing will refresh others.

I was thinking about this, and the nature of a person who is like that. Jesus described their speech and conduct as ‘a cup of cool water’ to another. That is beautiful imagery, because they hear the word and receive the rest and refreshing which is like the dew of Hermon. Then, as they testify or live by that word, they bring that rest and refreshing to others.

Alternatively, the same word, ministered precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little, causes those who will *not* hear and receive it to deviate from the path of life, so ‘that they go, fall backward, be broken, snared, and caught’.

### **The reverse progression**

In coming months, we will look at that. We will demonstrate that that is ‘the four grounds’, but in reverse. It is going from good ground to stony and thorny ground, to wayside ground, to being captured, where the birds of the air take away the inheritance.

A person’s fall from sonship and fellowship in Christ, as I said, is progressive. The prophet Isaiah noted that this progression was the effect of failing to receive the word of God.

### **Uncleanness leads to idolatry**

A person may sit in judgement of the message and the messenger and entertain alternative conversations that we have considered over this season.

The point is that the alternative conversations made them *unclean*. Because they did not allow the water of the word to wash them of their uncleanness, He *gives them over to their idolatry*. Uncleanness makes them vulnerable to unclean spirits, which then affirms their idolatry, and they are given over to it.

It is interesting that in the very passages that preceded the ones that described the effect of the word, Isaiah said, ‘The priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink.’ Isa 28:7.

They became caught in a conversation that was other than the conversation of faith that belongs in the presbytery.

### **An unclean agape table**

He said, ‘The priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink, they are swallowed up by wine, they are out of the way.’

That sounds like someone who deviated, or went astray, which is called ‘iniquity’.

‘They are out of the way through intoxicating drink, they err in vision, they stumble in judgement [which literally means ‘fall in judgement’]. For all tables are full of vomit and filth; [and] no place is clean.’ Isa 28:7-8.

That is a stark statement, isn’t it? It is powerful. The ‘table’ referred to is where you are supposed to eat an *agape* meal. That is a foul *agape* meal, isn’t it? It is fully decked out with vomit and filth!

This is, ‘there is no place clean’. That means that the conversation, even though it might have a religious ‘hue’, is not actually what the Lord or the Spirit is saying.

### **A clean agape table**

That is what we are delivered from. We are being delivered to a different form of conversation, which is ‘the conversation of faith’, which ‘looks like’ the obedience of faith, or offering.

We will look forward to continuing in this theme in our next session.