

I. Introduction:

- A. Sometimes a poor memory and short attention span can be good things – not usually – but sometimes.
 - 1. Last month I brought a lesson from **verse 2** –
 - 2. *“This is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was sore afraid.”*
 - 3. The title was *“What makes you sad?”*
- B. Just for this evening, I’d like you to forget that message and forget that the word *“sorrow”* can be translated *“evil”* and *“wickedness.”*
 - 1. I hope that I made my point three weeks ago, and the Lord blessed us.
 - 2. But this evening, looking at Artaxerxes’ words again, I’d like to bring a entirely different devotional.

II. We are all prone to sorrow.

- A. I confess that at times this week my heart has been as gloomy as Monday’s and Tuesday’s weather.
 - 1. I may have said the same sort of thing during my last message from this text.
 - a. Don’t assume that this is my usual condition; that I’m clinically depressed or something
 - b. But the truth is I have down days and down hours as much as I have positive up days.
 - 2. During this week there have been things to cause that gloom and most of them were not the same as those of three weeks ago.
 - 3. I’m not embarrassed to mention this, because I’m guessing that you have had your blue moments as well.
 - 4. As I say, we are all prone to periods of sorrowful hearts – similar, but less intense, than Nehemiah’s.
- B. The root reason for this is the natural condition of our hearts – spiritually, not cardiologically.
 - 1. Nearly every reference I will make this evening to the heart is to the same Hebrew word.
 - 2. Every reference I use this evening until I get to the New Testament are all related by way of this word.
- C. Remember that **Jeremiah 17:9** says – *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”*
 - 1. And **Proverbs 20:9** implies that there is nothing we can do about it in ourselves, *“Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?”*
 - 2. **Genesis 6:5** – *“And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”*
 - 3. The Bible teaches that sin has corrupted each of us to our very core – we are totally depraved – so our hearts have a natural propensity to spiral in a downward trajectory.
 - 4. We see this in Nehemiah, Job, Hannah and so many other Bible saints.
 - 5. **Proverbs 28:26** – *“He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.”*

III. In Nehemiah’s case, his fall into the slough of despondency was encouraged by meditations of that heart.

- A. He got the sad news of Hanani, and he simply couldn’t shake it.
 - 1. His picture of wonderful Jerusalem had been shattered, and his hopes for that city had been scattered.
 - 2. I can easily see how that for 4 months his mind, followed by his heart, had turned & returned to that report.
 - 3. Then his imagination became engaged & those three things were like lead balls dragging him downward.
- B. But here is the thing – we have some control over the meditations of our hearts.
 - 1. With the blessing and help of the Holy Spirit we can point our hearts in an upward trajectory.
 - 2. We can *“set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”*
 - 3. *“If we be risen with Christ, (with God’s grace) we can seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.”*
 - 4. There is a verse which always brings a smile to my face because of a very unique word; it is used only once in the Bible. **Psalm 45:1** says – *“My heart is inditing a good matter.”*
 - a. *“My HEART is inditing a good matter”* – there is that same heart.
 - b. But this time it is apparently stirring, constantly stirring, good thoughts.

- C. **Psalm 105:3** says, *“Glory ye in the holy name of Jehovah: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord.”*
1. This is essentially the Old Testament equivalent of **Colossians 3:1** – *“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.”*
 2. As I have told myself so many times, Christians have a choice about the subject matter for our thoughts.
 3. For example, *“the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes”* – **Psalm 19**.
 4. If the statutes of the Lord rejoice the heart, then perhaps that is where we should plant our thoughts.

IV. In Nehemiah we see that the condition of our hearts affects the way we live our lives.

- A. Nehemiah was sad and Artaxerxes knew it.
1. Where might that have ended? It could have resulted in Nehemiah’s execution.
 2. That was the theme of my last message.
 3. But remember, the Lord sees our hearts far more clearly than our neighbors.
 4. *“The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.”*
 5. The Lord knows whether or not we have a *“right”* to be sad.
- B. I mentioned Hannah a moment ago.
1. You remember that Hannah was the mother of Samuel.
 2. This woman was living a miserable life in the house of Elkanah – along with his second wife Peninnah.
 - a. I believe that this polygamous situation was through no fault of poor Hannah; it was what it was.
 - b. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none, and that wicked woman made sure that her house-mate heard about it day after day after day.
 - c. Hannah felt that she was a failure; she had failed her husband; the anger of God was upon her.
 3. Despite her faith in the Lord, Hannah’s heart & life dwelt among the dust bunnies under the marriage bed.
 - a. Her heart probably couldn’t get any lower.
 - b. She even turned to drink – or at least the mistaken priest thought she had.
 4. Then the Lord gave to Hannah a son, whom she named Samuel, which some think means *“asked of God.”*
 5. In the first verse of **I Samuel 2** – *“Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD.”*
 6. Earlier, her heart could not have been any lower, but then the blessing of the Lord came – *“And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD.”*
 7. I have no doubt that old Eli, the priest, could see her joyful heart as easily as he had seen her broken heart.
- C. **Proverb 23:7** is a familiar verse which can be applied in several ways, but I’ll point to only one tonight.
1. Solomon says, *“As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.”*
 2. The direction to which you point your heart will determine the sort of person you are on that day.
 3. The Lord Jesus said, *“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.”*
 - a. You can choose to let your heart be troubled, or you can trust the Saviour.
 4. He added, *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”*
- D. In **Psalm 57:7** David made a statement which is confusing to the untaught.
1. He said, *“My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.”*
 2. If he isn’t thinking, someone might say that David suggests that his heart had been repaired, and of course it had been repaired by the grace of God. He had been regenerated.
 3. But in this verse he wasn’t speaking of repair, but of being fixed into place – his heart was steadfast.
 4. Ideally, this is where we should all be, *“My heart is determined, O God, my heart is set in concrete: I will sing and give praise,”* and nothing will disturb it.
 5. The attacks of God’s enemies will not keep me from God’s praise.
 6. The desertion of my friends will not turn my eyes from your glorious face.
 7. Not even Satan himself will keep me from joy which I have in my Saviour.

- E. And by the way, Satan most definitely does have the ability to fill the heart of the Christian with garbage.
 - 1. Ananias, *“why have you permitted the Devil to fill your heart with this nonsense?”*
 - 2. Why can't we learn to put our foot down and tell Satan to back off?
 - 3. *“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” – James 4:7.*

V. Artaxerxes said, “This is nothing else but sorrow of heart.” Then was Nehemiah sore afraid.

- A. Should we be concerned about the emotional state of our heart?
 - 1. I know that Nehemiah's concern was related to the king's reaction to what he saw.
 - 2. But is there a lesson here for us?
 - 3. Wasn't this a part of my earlier message?
- B. There are so many ways that Christians destroy their testimonies before the world.
 - 1. When they openly sin or commit a crime, the self-righteous lost man will turn away from our God.
 - 2. Another is when that Christian shows no difference between himself and the world.
 - 3. Our goals should not be the same as the those of the lost world – wealth, pleasure, power and position.
 - 4. And our fears should not be the same as the fears of the lost – Covid-19, poverty, loss of physical beauty.
 - 5. Has not the Lord given us new hearts – different hearts from those of the unsaved?
 - 6. Our hearts are in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of waters, he turneth it whithersoever he would.
 - 7. But like everyone else we strive in a futile attempt to build dams on those rivers – struggling to keep God from turning us.
- C. To where does the Lord want to turn our hearts?
 - 1. Toward Heaven; toward His will, and toward fellowship with Him.
 - 2. When there is joy in heaven over a repenting sinner, there should be the echo of joy on earth – in our hearts.
 - 3. When some Hannah we know is blessed, the rest of her family should be filled with joy.
 - 4. No matter how bad things may appear to be there is always room for joy in the Lord.