

The Searcher of the Inmost Heart

This mornin g I am not going to talk in ~~this sermon~~ about the war. ~~Nor am I thinking about the presidential campaign. Neither is my~~ essential concern this morning the ~~racial~~ question nor the probelm of a League of Nations. While I am speaking this morning I expect that the moisome, turbulent world will continue to swirl about us, but I want that we shall for just a few moments shut ourselves away from the world into the quieter recesses of that secret chamber in which the human heart discovers God.

In these days of mechanistic supremacy we have almost stifled the human heart. We have tried to deny its longings and its murmurrings, but we have not quite succeeded. Despite all of the attempts of modern society to make the human being into a heartless robot, the heart of man, deep down within the wources of his being, is yet very real and very tender. Man is yet a creature who feel and thinks, suffers and enjoys. A recent maganzine article dealing with the plight of modern religious education was entitled:

"Ren-enter the human soul".

Regardless of all the self-sufficiency of modern science there is yet a need within the life of man which cries out for strength and stability.

Professor Whitehead of Harvard once declared that "Religion is what we do with our solitariness". And if that is true it is then important that every man search the inward depths of his soul to be sure that God is there.

Said a college student to his professor of religion: "What I really want to know is this: Does God know my name?" There is the indication from a human heart that one wants to know if God is actually very near to human life and the human soul.

As small boy decl ared that he did not pray because: "God is like

my father; he is too busy to listen."

In the book of Revelation the writer at the outset writes to seven churches and speaks intimately of their problems. He cautions them where they are in danger and he praises them where they have shown good faith. In the letter to the church at Thyatira he is concerned for their toleration of a sectarian party. Many of them have been paying only lip service to Christ and worshipping him outwardly when inwardly they were trying to deceive. But John declares that Christ is not content with formal observance, like the pagan gods. Nor is he concerned with the mere show of good conduct. Rather, says John, Christ is THE SEARCHER OF THE INMOST HEART. It is thus that I should like for us to think this morning that God is the SEARCHER OF THE INMOST HEART. There are really two aspects of God's searching.

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As THE SEARCHER OF THE INMOST HEART, not motives or feelings, however deeply rooted in the heart, escape God's judgment and reach. God knows what is in the hearts of men and he is not mocked thereby. God remonstrates. God seeks to ferret out all that is evil within the hearts of men; he knows when we hide our motives and deeper feelings behind a cloak of respectability.

We can hide our inmost thoughts and feelings from others, but not from God. Thus all of the inner poisons of grudge, revenge, hatred, lust, covetousness, jealousy may not immediately discolor our outward lives. But they do mar and injure the inmost heart, and they cannot be hid from God. Therefore we should be intelligent enough to know that no evil thought or feeling can be fully hid from God and because they can't we should try to make our hearts right.

I recall seeing once a famous slogan for a paint company's advertisement. It read something like this:

"Save the surface and you save all".

That may be a very good advertising slogan, but it is extremely poor religion. In the ultimate life of man it is the depths that count, not the ~~7~~ surface.

This is the very essence and fact of Jesus' ^(Christianity) religion. The religion of Jesus conceives a God who looks deeply into the inmost hearts of men to see the conditions of their hearts and not the states of their outer appearances. At every turn Jesus could detect the surly dishonest spirit that lay hidden beneath the ornaments of outward life. It was Jesus who said with keen insight: "Ye have heard it said of old that thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you he that looks upon a woman with lust in his heart has committed adultery with her already". God searches the hearts of men and knows what is there. With God it is the attitude of every heart that counts for the most.

So it was with stinging rebuke that Jesus is pictured by the writer of Revelation as condemning inward waywardness. In those days when ~~a~~ fidelity to the great cause was desperately needed, there could be no pampering of the deceitful. God, searching the inmost heart, was wont to punish its waywardness. This decree is harsh, but it is the way life works.

People who nurture inward grudges and evil feelings of any kind, sooner or later bring destruction upon themselves. Sooner or later these poisonous acids, held inside so long, seep out and spoil even the outer surface. Then life goes to pieces.

So it is, too, that God sees through the life that tries to worship in an outward form. The Israelites tried to do this, but God knew their inmost heart and He punished them. What greater mockery is there after all, then when human antics are displayed before God while yet the heart is turned away, cold and untouched. It is the experience of Hamlet when he confessed:

"My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
Words without thoughts never to heaven go."

Jesus tried to get men to see that God does search every heart and that He knows every evil thought and feeling. Jesus knew so well that ~~the~~ God looks for purity within the heart of man and so he should say: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." No man can be right with God whose inner heart is gnarled and warped by evil. God holds each man responsible for the ugliness of his inmost heart.

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God, the Great Heart, seeks to enter every human so that it may be given strength and peace. The great searching heart of God is never at rest as long as a single heart of man is untouched, unchanged by this warm contact. The Searcher seeks the heart of man that that heart may be made more fruitful and more noble.

There is a famous poem by Francis Thompson which is called THE HOUND OF HEAVEN. It is an attempt to portray God's relentless searching after every human heart. It likens God unto a hound that pursues the hectic course of a fox with untiring energy. Men, like foxes, are evasive and deviating, but God, like the hound, will not give up. He pursues the souls of men down the centuries, and through the years. At every turn ~~the~~ of the trail man will dodge and hide, but the Great Searcher of the Inmost Heart will not let man alone. He wants to make him unto himself.

Although George Santayana wrote without placing his confidence in a personal God, his poetic words are, nonetheless, true;

O World thou choolest not the better part!

It is not wisdom to be only wise,

And on the inward vision close the eyes,

But it is wisdom to believe the heart.

It is wisdom to believe the heart, for the heart is man's meeting place with God. There is within the life of every human soul that "still small voice" which is the voice of God speaking to the heart and mind of man. This is, in another way of thinking, man's conscience. The conscience of man - that within him which is deepest and best - is the most intimate pathway to God. Here man and God meet in the human soul.

Conscience is that faculty by which we judge of acts as right or wrong. In one of his sermons Phillips Brooks compared the conscience to the eye and showed that just as the eye can say of a branch of a tree, "this is straight or crooked", the conscience of man can see character and see, "This is good or bad." In another respect it is this conscience which shows one the life of God. One sitting by a window may not have the sight to see the tree that is outside his window. ~~But~~ Consequently he does not know it is there in all of its beauty. He has no desire to see it. But if suddenly vision is to come to him he can then see it and he can revel then in its glory. So too one may not know God because he has never really wanted to know God by doing His will. But if one day he does decide to try and know that will, decides that he wants life to be more beautiful and meaningful and deep, then by the light of his inner conscience he can see God at work. The great discovery that comes from the opened conscience is the fact of God's life.

In the great French novel, LES MISERABLES, Victor Hugo asks: "What is conscience?" and the Answer comes back, "It is the compass of the unknown". When a man tries honestly to do what he knows is right and best, he then possess a compass that leads to God who may be unknown.

Whenever we feel the call of goodness tugging at our inner heart, pleading with us and beckoning us on, we may be sure that God is near.

The pull of God

Jesus in the wilderness felt the presence of God surging within him, urging him to be the noblest and the best self that he knew. Needless to say that in that experience of Temptation Jesus found God and drew very near to him. And in the Garden of Gethsemane once again Jesus felt the lifting pressure of God against the more lowly weight of selfishness. But certainly in that experience Jesus was drawn closely to God. Paul on the Road to Damascus fought against the intensity of his own conscience. It was a struggle within himself - and with God - to determine what was right and best. And when he heard Jesus speaking to him, "Saul, Saul why persecutest thou me?" he knew that he was very near to God. The fact that Jesus and Paul won the greater victories in these tense situations is of no small significance ~~to~~ the fact that God searches persistently in to the hearts of men, urging them to be their best.

John Masefield once wrote that "God warms his hands at man's heart when he prays". This brings God into the human picture as we sense his presence in every moment of life when man is challegned to to his best. *How God must long for his children to seek Him!*

"In Him we live and move and have our being".

"Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee". Augustine.

But God cannot touch a human heart if it is not open unto him. Holman Hunt in his great picture "The Light of the World" has pictured so admirably this searching of God after the inmost heart of man. "Behold I stand at the door and knock, saith the Lord, and if any man will open the door I will come in and sup with him and he with me." God in this world is searching yet through the tangles of men's lives for their inmost hearts. And we have a great notion that He seek s us THROUGH Christ. After Holman Hunt had finished his painting he was

showing it to a friend who looked at it long and thoughtfully and then remarked. "It is beautiful, but you have left out one important, though small detail. There is no latch on the door." "No", replied Hunt, "I have not left it out. It is meant to be significant, for the latch is on the inside."

PSALM 139