
As a dad, I remember the day my oldest daughter was born. I remember like it was yesterday. We had a scheduled C-Section, our appointment was in the morning. We had to get to the hospital pretty early. So early that it was still dark outside. I remember telling my family, “Bri and I have to be there at 7am, but the procedure isn’t until 9am. So you don’t have to come until 8:30am” My family was there before we got there at 6. They beat us there! They were ready!

They were directed to sit in the waiting room – not just a few people....mom, dad, all of my siblings, grandmothers, great uncles, family friends...they exceeded room capacity to say the least. And they were in the room doing everything BUT waiting. Believe it or not, they were in there playing games, eating food, and taking bets – height, weight, boy or girl (my mom had talked us into waiting until the baby was born to find out the sex – which to this day, one of the most special decisions we ever made). It was Vegas in the waiting room of St. Vincent Hospital.

So when our daughter was finally born, I remember walking down the hall into the casino, I mean waiting room, to make the announcement. Everyone gets quiet, and when I announce that it’s a girl...the place erupts! It’s crazy. I kid you not, my mom is so excited she nearly tackles me! I actually have footage of this moment. Check this out...

I’ll just say, the video doesn’t do this moment justice. These cheers were SO loud. When the nurses down the hall heard it, they told us they thought the Colts were playing and had scored a game-winning touchdown. And the way mom tackled me? She could’ve made the Colts practice team.

Maybe you remember the day you brought a child into this world, or the day you adopted. Maybe you can recall holding your niece or nephew for the first time, or your younger sibling. To certain degrees, many of us can relate to the joy people experience when having children.

But the excitement that my family had wasn’t just around the birth of the child itself. It wasn’t the event. What my family saw was something deeper. You see, there were moments leading up to the announcement that made it special. There were conversations we had. We talked about what fatherhood meant. The memories that my wife and I couldn’t wait to create. The unconditional love that I was looking forward to expressing to my unborn child.

Way before hearing the life-changing news that a girl was born, they heard the heart of a father. They heard that I was a father who already loved her, was here for her, and though I knew I was going to make plenty of mistakes along the way – they knew that I would do absolutely

ANYTHING for this child. They heard and saw my heart. The heart of a father. That's what led to a celebration that completely rocked the second floor of that hospital.

If you have your Bibles, I want you to turn with me to Matthew 3. What we're getting ready to see is this amazing announcement that takes place. In similar fashion, it isn't the announcement itself that is so impactful – it's the heart behind it. It's the relationship that is implied deep underneath it.

And what's unique about this is that there are two groups of people who respond very differently to the same announcement. Two groups who have different dispositions towards this. One group is able to see the heart of a Father. The other group sees something totally different. Let's look at it, beginning in verse 1.

In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said,

*"He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord's coming!
Clear the road for him!"* Matthew 3:1-3 (NLT)

So just to set the stage, we have this guy named John the Baptist (nickname). JTB is the older cousin of Jesus. He was a prophet and he had one assignment...Prepare the Way. Meaning his job was to tell anyone and everyone about the coming of the Messiah; To make an announcement. Over and over again, he pointed people to Jesus – saying, "Hey this man, who is greater than me, is coming. And he's not just a man. He's God!" In other words... he was saying, "GOD IS HERE!"

That's what the announcement was. It had been 400 years since the last prophet spoke any words from God. And after all of that silence, people begin hearing this message that the Kingdom of Heaven is here. The inauguration is happening here on Earth! Well, let's see how this plays out. Verse 4...

John's clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey. People from Jerusalem and from all of Judea and all over the Jordan Valley went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. Matthew 3:4-6 (NLT)

Clearly, our guy stood out a little bit. He had an odd diet and a weird sense of fashion. Weird to us, but I feel like Gen Z would find a way to make camel hair trendy! I'm just waiting for a Tik Tok video to go viral with a 16 year old dancing in a camel hair vest now that I proposed the idea.

But despite his unique wardrobe and appetite, we see that people from all over the region came out to hear this announcement. And not only that, they responded! People are getting baptized left and right...hundreds, if not thousands.

You ever seen a spontaneous baptism here at one of our campuses? Maybe you were baptized spontaneously here. There's nothing like it. I've been a part of several and it never gets old! There are tears. And prayer. And hugs. And more tears. I hear incredible stories. People confessing sin and professing Jesus as Savior. People who showed up not expecting to get wet, but here they are. And nothing else matters. It's incredible!

We'll take that...times 1,000. That's what we have here as all of these Jewish people are getting baptized!

We read something like this and we have a tendency to just skim over it. Because maybe it's usual for us. We have a habit of normalizing Scripture after hearing these stories so many times. But this wasn't normal! Jews didn't get baptized in John's day. That was not common. You know why? Baptism was reserved for Gentiles who converted to Judaism. Did you know that? So, for a Jewish person during this time to submit to baptism was to say, "I confess that I am as far away from God as a Gentile and I need to get right with Him."

So there was clearly something that took place deep in the heart of someone who came forward to be baptized here. We're going to talk about what that was in a second....but first, I want us to keep reading and see what happens next. Buckle up, things are about to get spicy! Look at this:

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. "You brood of snakes!" he exclaimed. "Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Matthew 3:7-8 (NLT)

Wow, that escalated quickly! All of the sudden, these religious leaders show up on the scene and clearly JTB wasn't expecting their arrival. I think he was caught off guard. I almost picture that he's in the middle of baptizing someone when this happens. I've never dropped someone when doing a baptism. I've come very close, and it was almost bad news bears! But so far, I'm shooting 100% on taking someone under and making sure they come back up. But I just imagine that JTB is in mid-baptism when he sees these religious leaders coming and he's so taken aback, that he drops the person in the Jordan River and says to someone nearby "Hold my camel hair. It's about to get ugly." And John begins to go in on them! He starts by calling them a 'Brood of snakes!'

When I was growing up, if you called someone out of their name those were fighting words!

Here's what I wonder: Did the religious leaders say anything back? Matthew doesn't seem to imply that they did, because he doesn't record a response from them. But I have a hard time believing that they just took those words on the chin like, "I guess we're a family of snakes!"

In fact, In my mind I picture this as a like a square off. You remember in the 90's where you had these movies with these epic scenes where two groups of people would just take turns insulting one another verbally? Movies like, Hook?

Hook Movie

Rufio is tearing Peter Pan up. I mean he's roasting him. And then finally Peter comes back with some heat!....."Bang-a-rang Peter!" Anyone remember?

Or one of my all-time favorites...

Sandlot Movie

Anyone remember this one? "You play ball like a girl!" If you haven't seen it...get out!

This is how I picture this whole dialogue; this interaction going down! As you guys can tell, I have a lot of fun when I'm studying Scripture. A little too much fun. But can I just say, the reason I do this is because the Bible is real to me. It's about real people, in real times, in real places. It's not just ancient literature. Now yes, the Bible is made up different types of literature – poetry, history, biography, narrative. And should be read that way. But still, the Bible is not old, and it's definitely not boring. It's alive and active, because the Spirit of God is living and active!

So....John calls them some snakes, and then says, "Prove by the way you live that you have repented and turned to God." In other words, he's saying, 'A changed heart results in a changed life!'

But what we're getting ready to see him say next puts everything in perspective. I want you to pay attention, because, it gets at the root of the problem. Look at verse 9...

Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.' That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. Even now the ax of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire. Matthew 3:9-10 (NLT)

I love the way another translation put it:

And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' ... Matthew 3:9 (NIV)

If you have a Bible, circle underline that part right there. This was the problem. Their was their view of God. Their Father. They didn't view God rightly, so they didn't view themselves rightly! Abraham was their ancestor whom much of Judaism was centered around. And they thought they were safe because of their religion. And John the Baptist is saying, 'No, no, no' you have it

all wrong. You're looking at your heritage and I'm telling you to look at the heart of God. The heart of your Heavenly Father, not the work of your ancestor. You're placing your faith in a belief system. I'm telling you about a God that you can have an actual encounter with!

And 2,000 years later the message is still the same. As a body of people who have the very Spirit of God in us, our job is to bear fruit and say,

"I haven't just heard. I've encountered! I've encountered the heart of God."

Here's the truth: People can argue with theology. They can bash the church. They can debate the validity of the Bible all day. Believe me, I've had my fair share of debates. But they cannot deny a person who has encountered Jesus, and is being radically changed by the heart of God!

Men's group...I want them to:

1. See more of God's character
2. Fall more in love with Jesus.

"I want you to see him. Love him. Be loved by him. That's the only thing that will change you!"
Because the reality is....

A changed heart comes from experiencing God's heart.

That's what separated the two groups who heard the same announcement yet had two different experiences. One had an encounter with the heart of the Father. The other had entitlement with their heritage.

THE HEART OF GOD

What I want to do with the remainder of our time is answer the question, "What does the heart of God look like?" What does it express? And what was it about John's words that beautifully depicted the heart of our heavenly Father and caused hundreds of people to turn to Him!

We'll look at three expressions of God's heart that we get not only from this text, but that are anchored in the entire narrative of Scripture.

If you're taking notes, write these down or take a picture of them. And I want to challenge you to live in them this week. Whether you've been following Jesus for 30 days or 30 years, I believe these words deeply impact all of us. Maybe you choose one of them that you need to and write it on a sticky note and post it somewhere you see every day, make it the lock-screen on your phone, something that will allow you to be reminded of God's heart.

The Heart of the Father says...

"I Am Here."

Do you know that this is the essence of the Bible? Genesis to Revelation is a story about a Holy God who dwells with His people, letting them know that He is present, that He is not far off, that He wants this relationship with them. It's a beautiful story about a Father pursuing his children....and after 400 years of radio silence, this prophet steps on the scene shouting from the rooftops, "God is here! His kingdom is here. He wants to live within the heart of every single person who is willing to come to Him!"

That's what drew these people in...

They didn't just hear a proclamation....they heard the fulfillment of a Promise!

They didn't just hear an announcement...they heard of an arrival!

But what about us? What keeps us from truly believing this? Even if you consider yourself a Christian, there are things that tend to question if our God is here. If he is actually with us!

Hardship | Maybe you've had some extremely tough life experiences – pain, loss. And in that hardship, you prayed that God would heal, save, provide. And it seemed like He was silent. Just like the Jews, you experienced a long period of silence. And over time what you mistook as silence eventually turned into a view of absence.

Father wounds | Maybe you grew up and your father wasn't there the way you wanted him to be. And a day like today is a struggle for you. Because your experience of a father is one who was distant, cold, absent – either physically or emotionally, or both. So you have a hard time wrapping your brain around the concept of a good father who is present.

Can I just say that those are very real experiences that have real effects and come with real emotions. And I will never discount the pain that is rooted in some of those experiences by telling someone to just have more faith.

But what I will say is that even in the reality of a physically or emotionally absent earthly father, You have a heavenly father who is madly in love with you and is omnipresent – meaning He is present everywhere at the same time. So if that's true, that means he's with You.

What I will say is that even in the reality of pain and loss, you have a heavenly father who says, "I AM CLOSE TO THE BROKEN HEARTED."

What I will say is that even when there are times when we don't feel God is present in our lives, He has given us everything we need in His Son and His Spirit. Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14). So as long as we know Jesus died for us, we know that God loves us!

And He wants us to turn from whatever we're running to – the sin that separates us, and He wants us to turn toward Him! JTB said, "Repent and TURN TO GOD....COME TO YOUR FATHER! Because He's here!"

Favorite part of my day = coming home to family. Kids don't run away, they run toward me screaming, "Daddy!" They're reminded that I AM HERE.

The second expression of God's heart.

"Trust and Obey."

This is probably the most difficult one for us, because we have this thing in our lives called pride. I don't know if you have it, but I do! Lots of it. And pride is what keeps us from trusting God. Our lack of obedience stems from our lack of trust. We believe our way is better. And even when we know it's wrong, we do it anyway and justify it.

Maybe ya'll are a little more holy than me. But there have been times in my life that I have struggled with obedience to God. I can't tell you how many times I've said, "God, this is the last time." And God is up there saying, "Bro, you said that the last time!"

But something happens when you experience the heart of God. You encounter this beautiful thing called grace. And believe it or not, it's grace that leads us to live a obedience. it is His heart of grace that leads us to repentance and allows us to fully trust him. There's this Scripture I love in the book of Titus Chapter 2 that says,

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age Titus 2:11-12

When we have God's heart, we're changed by His grace. And we trust that His ways are better than ours. We've seen the beauty of His heart, and we no longer want to engage in the very sin that breaks it!

"Jesus is better."

- Friend who struggled with addiction, wanted accountability
- Text message convo – "Jesus is better"
- Maybe that's what some of you need to write down on your sticky note, under Trust and Obey – you put in parenthesis..."Jesus is Better"

My kids are disobedient. But as dad, I want nothing more than for my kids to trust me. And at the same time, I want them to obey me. And it's not because I want to kill the joy in their lives. It's because I want them to have joy! I see things that they don't. And through a relationship, I want their trust in me to produce obedience...even when they may not fully understand why. They know, "Daddy knows what's best." What he says is better.

And God wants the same thing. He wants our trust in Him to produce obedience TO Him.

Here's the last one. God says...

“You’re Mine.”

These are the beautiful words spoken by our Heavenly Father. We are His. God calls us his children.

Do you remember what JTB said to the religious leaders after telling them ‘Don’t say Abraham is your father?’.....He said, “God can create children of Abraham out of stones.” In other words he was saying, ‘Children of Abraham are a dime a dozen. But what I’m telling these people is that they’re children of the Living God. And because His kingdom is here, they have everything they need in Him and nothing else.’

The Heart of God says you are his son. You are his daughter. And nothing can ever change that!

Not just that. He delights in you! Do you know what happens in Matthew 3 right after John The Baptist tells all these people about Jesus and gives the Pharisees a good tongue lashing? The very Person he was preparing the way for shows up. And everyone there gets a front row seat at this incredible experience.

I want you to see what happens in this moment. Look at verse 13...

Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. But John tried to talk him out of it. “I am the one who needs to be baptized by you,” he said, “so why are you coming to me?”

But Jesus said, “It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires.” So John agreed to baptize him.

After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.” Matthew 3:13-17 (NLT)

This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy! You know what’s crazy about this? Right after his baptism, Jesus is led out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And from there, he begins his ministry. So before Jesus ever did anything, he heard these words of affirmation from His Heavenly Father.

Before he overcame the devil’s temptation. Before he ever healed anyone. Raised someone from the dead. Walked on water. Fed thousands of people with a few pieces of food. Cast out demons...he already had the approval and validation of His father! He heard that he was loved and that he brought joy to his Dad. He heard His Father’s heart.

Some of you may know a little bit of my story, but many of you don't. I grew up right here in Indy. Went to Pike High School, which is just down the road. And ever since I can remember, I played basketball. I played other sports growing up too, but I was obsessed with basketball. My dad coached me for most of my childhood and even up through high school. I went on to play basketball in college, which was an awesome experience.

And in college, I'm playing ball that I considered pledging a fraternity. And it was the same fraternity my dad pledged. I remember coming home during a break. He had picked me up from the airport and on the ride home, I told him I was thinking about joining. And I'll never forget the smile that came across his face. It was a smile of joy. He had seen me hit game-winning shots. He began talking about his experience, and I could just tell that he was proud.

I get back to school and a few weeks go by, and long story short I change my mind. I said, you know what I'm just going to focus on basketball right now. I have enough on my plate as it is. But you know what...I couldn't get my dad's smile out of my head. I couldn't escape seeing the joy he had knowing his son was going to follow in his footsteps. But I knew it had to tell him. And for some reason, it scared me. I felt this sense of fear that was so heavy. The thought of disappointing him. The fear of letting him down. It was crushing me.

And so one night, I come to my apartment after practice. I go into my room and I'm sitting on my bed, trying to muster up the courage to call my dad. I finally dial the numbers and I remember just making small talk. He's asking about how the season is going. Classes. My grades. The usual. And I'm stalling. Finally...I tell him.

And I don't hear him say anything for what seemed to me like minutes. It was just silence....

And then I hear him say these words to me. Words that significantly changed me forever. He said...

"Kyle, listen to me....I love you. And I love because you're my child."

I had never heard those words expressed like that before. My dad had told me he loved me, but for some reason those words hit my heart in a way I had never experienced. I remember hanging up the phone and just bawling like a baby. I sat there on my bed sobbing, not in sadness but in relief. Because for so long I had been carrying this weight. This pressure. And in a moment, it was dropped. I FELT FREE. I no longer felt this desire to perform. To earn approval. I knew I had it. And it gave me a new foundation to live from.

And I believe deep in my soul that someone watching or listening to this needs to hear those same words right now. You've never heard those words spoken to you. Maybe you've spent your entire life trying to live up to other people's expectations...your parents; your peers. You've been striving to find your worth in your accomplishments, achievements, and accolades. And its exhausting.

Maybe for the first time, or the first time in a long time...you need to hear the heart of The Father. And you need to let those words wash over you. You need to know that your heavenly Father looks at you and says, "I love you because you are my child. And you're my child because of what has already been done!"

Jesus went to a cross and rose from a grave so that you could have a relationship a Father who loves you unconditionally, and all of you have to do is repent and believe. And as you do that, I promise you'll experience the heart of a Father Who will tell you:

"I'm here. Trust and obey me. You're mine. And nothing can ever change that!"

PRAY – God's presence, Trust and obedience, His children
That people would experience His heart, turn to Him.
Take us deeper. Show us more of who You are. We want your Heart!
Help us believe even more of You!