

He Heals The Broken Hearted

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Date: 18 June 2023

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to turn back together again to Psalm 147. In particular, I want us to focus on the words of verse 3. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. As I think most of you will know, last month we saw the passing of Professor Donald MacLeod, who was known to so many people connected with the free church, with the island and with the church more widely. For 40 years he taught systematic theology at the free church college, which has since been renamed Edinburgh Theological Seminary. He wrote several books, he wrote newspaper columns for many years, and he was really widely known as a preacher and a writer.

And so many people have been blessed and helped by his ministry. I'm one of those people, and I feel hugely indebted to Donald MacLeod for what I've learned from him over the years.

The two things that I learned from him, I learned many things from him, but two things I learned from him are in many ways summing up what I hope to do with you this evening.

The first is that Donald MacLeod spoke so powerfully about the love of God. In one of the tributes that was written to him after he died, somebody wrote that they described Donald MacLeod's preaching as stretching the English language to its limits to describe how much God loves his people. And I thought that was such an accurate description of Donald MacLeod's preaching, such an amazing emphasis on the love of God. So that's one thing that I learned from him. The other thing I learned from Donald MacLeod is that you only need to go to one sentence in the Bible to find an incredible depth of truth. And he had that amazing ability to just take one sentence or even just half a sentence and unpack it.

And you would see just layer after layer of amazing truth that God is revealing in his word. And that reality that one sentence in the Bible can contain a hundred sermons worth of theology is definitely true of the words that are before us tonight. It's just a tiny sentence, but there is so much in it to teach us. He heals the brokenhearted and he binds up their wounds. That's a verse that teaches us about ourselves, some crucial truths about ourselves, about humanity, about how we are to understand ourselves. It teaches us some crucial truths about life, about what we experience, about what things will come our way. And it teaches us about God. It teaches us some of the most important truths about God that we can ever learn. And so I want us just to unpack this short sentence together tonight. And we're going to just look at three points. We're going to say first, that we have a heart.

[3 : 54] Second, that our hearts can break. And third, our hearts can be healed. We have a heart.

Our hearts can break. Our hearts can be healed. So first point we're going to say is that we have a heart. Now, you might think, well, that's extremely obvious Thomas. And I know it is extremely obvious, but it's actually a really important and a really interesting thing to think about. If you look at that statement, he heals the brokenhearted. The presupposition behind that is the fact that we have something in us called a heart. Humans have something in us called a heart. Now, when I say that, I hope you know straight away that I'm not referring to the physical organ that pumps blood, because that's not what this verse is talking about. And that's not what we mean when we speak about the heart in the way that this verse speaks about the heart. We're not meaning something physical.

So we're talking about something different. We're talking about something non physical, but yet something that's a key part of what we are something that's not physical, but yet is a key part of what we are. And there's various ways in which that gets described in the Bible. It can be described as our spirit. We might also describe it as our mind. We might describe it as our person. We might describe it as our self. We might describe it as our soul. It's the non physical thing that makes you you. And that's always a really important question to ask, you know, what makes you you. And the answer to that is a combination of physical and non physical things. So a big part of what makes me

me is the way I look, the fact that I'm tall, the fact that that forehead and my nose are both getting bigger all the time, I think. And whatever else is about me, just all the different physical things that make me the way I am. But really, that's not what makes me me most of all. What makes me me is my personality, my relationships, my memories, my passions, my goals. And that's the two for all of us that actually what makes us us what makes you you is is way more than just physical stuff. It's actually non physical stuff. And that's why actually our appearances can change an awful lot in our lifetime. But it's something non physical that that is at the heart of who we are. And so when the Bible talks about the heart, very rarely is speaking about an organ. Instead, it is referring to our inner being, our true self, if you like, the seat of our emotions, our thoughts, and our desires. And the point that we need to recognize first of all is that the Bible recognizes that we have a heart, the Bible recognizes that you have a heart that this non physical aspect to who you are is crucial. And this is actually really interesting when you look at at the history of philosophy, because this is striking on a question that's actually bothered people for thousands of years. And if you look back over the history of thought, stretching all the way back to the Greek philosophers of around two and a half thousand years ago, Plato and Aristotle and all of these guys, running all the way through today, all the way through until today, you can see that at many points, people have been wrestling with this question. What is more real, the physical or the non physical, the material or the spiritual? Where do you find three reality? Which one is more important? Which one is more real? For the Greeks, for Greek philosophy, all the emphasis was on the non physical on spiritual realities, or the realm of ideas is what they would sometimes refer to it as. And so much so that the Greek mindset had the view that physical stuff was actually bad. So the world was bad, and the body was bad. But what was really important was the non physical, spiritual realities, and the thinking and ideas of the philosophers. That was part of the reason why the philosophers were one of the most important people in the society, because that abstract thinking was prioritized. That was where truth and reality was to be found. Physical stuff was seen as bad. The world was actually seen as a kind of the physical world was actually seen as a kind of mistake that had happened as the gods ward. So Greek philosophy had this very, very strong kind of antifysical pro spiritual mindset. Christianity helped move people away from that, because it had this great emphasis on spiritual and physical reality together. And that's that's an emphasis that runs right through scripture. The fact that in the created realm, the world is God's creation, but it's made by God. So the physical world is made by God, but it's source is the non physical spiritual reality of God. And we as image bearers reflect that we have body and soul, physical and non physical, the two together make up what we are. And that kind of balanced influence shaped our thinking for a long, long, long, long time, right through to the reformation. After the reformation, in the last kind of 500 years or so, the pendulum started to swing the other way. So instead of having the Greeks who were like all spiritual and no, not really liking the physical, you swung the other way, where in the enlightenment and the post enlightenment period, all the focus became more and more on physical stuff. And part of that was good. That gave rise to huge advance in science and in terms of technology. But the focus became more and more and more on the physical and the spiritual became downplayed more and more. And the culmination of that was the rise of atheism in the end of the 19th century through the 20th century, where people would say, well, actually, spiritual reality isn't real at all. Instead, it's just all physical. And so you have this really interesting balance where, you know, 2000 years ago, you'd have Greeks saying, no, no, no, physical stuff is not so real. It's all spiritual. And then recently, you've got people who've been thinking, no, no, spiritual stuff is not real. It's all physical. And there's huge problems with both of these. The problem with the mindset that's arisen in the last 100 years, when you say everything is physical, where does that leave your heart? Where does that leave things like love and hate and truth and right and wrong? Where does it ultimately leave all that? Where does it leave relationships?

[11 : 57] And the problem with it all is that when you push all of that to a logical conclusion, the things that mean the most to us in our hearts, our friendships, our relationships, our marriages, our children, they're all explained in physical terms to say, well, you're just trying to protect your tribe. You're just trying to further your gene pool. You're just trying to procreate. You're just doing all of these things. It's all just physical impulses that shape the way you behave. And all that stuff that you have, love and joy and passion and desire, it's actually just an illusion. It's just an illusion that has no real basis.

And that's a hugely depressing worldview to have. And although so many people have sort of in many ways signed up for that over recent years, very few have actually thought it through. And the minute they start thinking it through, they realize they can't live with it because they know what the Bible knows. They know that we have a heart. The Bible recognizes the goodness and the importance of the physical and the non physical of the body and the heart. Our heart is key to who we are. It's key to our identity. So much of what makes us who we are is in our hearts, our passions, our desires, our dreams, our hopes, our fears. They're all things that our heart holds. Our heart is crucial to our ethical conduct, to our understanding of right and wrong, to our moral framework that we live by. And in fact, that's what makes humans stand out. That's what makes humans stand out from every other part of creation. If you look at animal behavior, if you look at what a fox will do with lambs, how would you describe it? A fox will go and will take a lamb and kill it and will take maybe half its ear off in order to feed its young and will leave the rest.

[14:33] How do you describe that? Heartless. You see it all over the animal kingdom. You see it in the behavior of machines. If you look at a machine, the way it works, the way it operates, it just keeps going, keeps functioning, keeps working. It's heartless. It's a great example of how it works. I don't quote from films because I'm not a film watcher. I watch a film called I Robot, which is set in the future and it's all about a world where very, very intelligent robots are a huge part of society. These robots are supposed to be very, very helpful. Everybody loves them and they're a huge part of everyone's life. Nobody has, nobody cleans because their robots clean for them, nobody cooks because the robot cooks for them, nobody even has to drive because the cars will drive for them. There's this wonderful world because of the robots, but there's one guy who hates them. He's the hero of the whole film because, well, I won't spoil it for you, but he's the hero of the whole film and what makes him stand out is that he doesn't like these robots. The reason he doesn't like the robots is because he was involved in a car crash and he was involved in a car crash where he ended up underwater. There was two cars underwater. He was in one of them and there was a little girl in the other one and he said, a robot jumped in and looked at me and looked at the girl and concluded that I had a 60% chance of survival, but the little girl only had a 20% chance of survival, so the robot got me and left the girl and he said a human would never do that. He said it should always have been the little girl that was saved and you'll have to watch the film to find out what happens next, but it was really interesting that that was what motivated his suspicion of the robots because they just acted as machines. They were heartless and even in humans, our behaviour, when our behaviour is subhuman, we describe it as heartless. When we hear about awful persecution in other parts of the world, when we look at war and all the awful things that are happening, the word we would describe that is heartless. So our hearts are crucial to our identity, they're crucial to our ethical conduct, they're crucial also to our convictions about faith and about truth and about life, all these big questions about ultimate reality, they're all questions of the heart, what you believe, what you really believe, that's never an outward ritualistic thing, it's a matter of the heart. If you think about life, if you think about everything that really matters to you, where does it all sit? It sits in your heart. The

Bible knows that, this verse knows that, the fundamental presupposition of what's been said here is the fact that we have a heart. And that's what makes, one of the many things that makes Christianity stand out from the alternative world views around us. You've got to have a worldview that can explain your heart. And it's so crucial for us to recognize that the Bible is the only place that gives us that. It's the only place you'll find a voice that really understands who you are. We have a heart. The second thing that this verse teaches us is that our hearts can break. And this is a massive reality in human experience.

When I write that sentence, everyone in here knows what I'm talking about. Everyone. Everyone can think of a time when our hearts have been broken. And maybe you're sitting here tonight feeling exactly like that. And when we talk about the kind of physical, non-physical balance that shapes our reality, physical pain is a massive part of life and an incredibly difficult part of life. But I think that even the person in here who has the most physical pain would still say a broken heart is worse. It's where we experience the worst pain of all. We experience it when, you know, we're hoping for something and it doesn't happen. That can happen in so many different ways. You've got plans in life. You think, I'm going to do this. I'm going to work hard for this. I'm going to try and achieve that. And it doesn't happen.

The hopes of our hearts are dashed. The thing that we really wanted to happen doesn't happen. It can also happen when the fears of our hearts are realized. So things that we don't want to happen do happen. And the things that we hope we'll never see, we end up seeing. It can happen in terms of a relationship with others. We can be hurt by other people. That's something that everybody experiences. Just people are so good at just being horrible to each other. Whether that's in school, all the way through life. Other people can hurt us. We can experience rejection, betrayal. And we experience the hurt of being separated from others. And that leaves a huge painful hole in our hearts. And it's interesting.

You see there's a correspondence between the positive things in our hearts and the pain that we're at risk of. So you hope for something in your heart and then it doesn't happen.

[21 : 08] And so the positive actually is connected to the pain. You try hard for something and it doesn't work out. You expect something and it doesn't go the way you want. You love someone and yet you lose them. And it's heart breaking. The Bible recognizes all of this reality. Recognizes that our hearts can be broken. Recognizes that life is full of bruises, scars and wounds. All of these marks are on our hearts. None of them are physical. But they're all there and they're painful. Our hearts can break. And connected to that is the reality that not only are we exposed to having our hearts broken, we are also capable of breaking other people's hearts. And that's the kind of just the sort of, I don't know, just the awful mess that sin has caused whereby we are in danger ourselves and yet we're also dangerous. We're vulnerable to all the pain and sorrow that a sinful broken world can bring. And yet we can also be a means through which others get hurt ourselves. And it's reminding us that the fall didn't just break a relationship with God. It broke our relationship with one another. And humanity made by God to love one another is now all too prone to hurt one another. And all of that just is just part of the pain and the sorrow that life can bring. Our hearts can break. And that's what's so clear in this verse. We have a heart. Our hearts can be broken. Our hearts can be wounded. But none of these are the main points of this verse. And if you look at that, in point number one, we've given you the kind of background, peace of position that lies behind the verse. In point number two, with exploring a truth that is central to the verse in many ways, but it's still not the main point. The main point of this verse is that our hearts can be healed. Our hearts can be healed. And that's where it's crucial to recognize something. Heartbreak is awful. But it is not incurable. Heartbreak is not incurable. There is a healer. It's

God. God is the healer of broken hearts. And that's just so, so incredible for us to think about that, you know, we're saying earlier that, you know, people have had all sorts of answers to life, big, life's big questions. When you had the Greek philosophers of long ago, the ultimate answer that they came to was that somewhere out there is God, a God who's like a kind of force or cause who makes everything else happen. But he's just way unreachable, unknowable, but he's some kind of like, he's like the one who sets everything off or draws everything towards himself, the final cause of everything. And over here, we've got the worldview that's emerged in the last 200, 300 years, everything physical, everything mechanistic, everything just grounded on a sort of naturalistic worldview, where ultimate reality is just nothing, or it's chance. And in the middle, you have the Bible that says ultimate reality is God, who is the healer of broken hearts. Ultimate reality is the God who is the healer of broken hearts. And that is true at what we can call a macro and a micro level. Macro just means big or long or whatever you want it to be. It just means big, broad, kind of across the scale level. Everything that causes heartbreak can be ultimately traced back to one thing, to the reality of sin. That's the cause of it all. That's the root of it all. And sin has caused that damage to us and to creation that causes so much heartbreak and sorrow. And the impact of sin is big. It's macro. It affects everything. But the incredible message of the Bible is that God has come to put that right. God has come to put all of that right. And that is really the big message of the Bible that at a macro level, the world is broken. But God has this magnificent plan, this beautiful plan to restore things and to put things right. And it all centres on Jesus. It's all foreshadowed in the Old Testament, culminating in the coming of Jesus, in his death and his resurrection. And it's all pointing forward to the day when Jesus returns. There's that big macro restoration where God is putting things right. He's healing everything that causes broken hearts. It's true at a macro level. But it's also true at a micro level.

That just means small, tiny, specific. In other words, it's just talking about you.

That God can heal your broken heart. And when you see that verse, like that's, that is what this verse is talking about. When he's talking about healing the broken hearted, the wounded, he's

talking about healing you. As you sit here with bruises and scars and sorrow in your heart, Jesus has come to heal your heart. Jesus has come to bind up your wounds. And I really want you to recognise that and believe that, that that is what he's come to do. It's not just a macro big project to fix the universe. It's a micro personal, beautiful project.

[28 : 51] Whereby Jesus died and rose again to wipe away your tears. To take you into his arms.

To hold you forever. And so as we think about our hearts, we recognise that the Bible knows that we have a heart. The Bible knows that our hearts can break, but the Bible promises us that our hearts can be healed all through Jesus Christ. Why is that possible? Why is that possible? The answer is because of God's heart. The whole reason you have a heart is because you're an image bearer of the God who has a heart. And the reason that your broken heart can be healed is because of God's heart for you. And the key theological truth that

I want you to press into your hearts in this from this is the fact that God is not and never ever can be heartless. God is never heartless. It's impossible for God to be heartless.

And the devil has tried to tell people the lie for since humanity was created that God's heartless, that he doesn't have your best interest at heart, that he doesn't really care about you. That is the lie that the devil has tried to spin again and again and again. It's interesting to go back to your Donald MacLeod quote. I was listening to somebody else talking about him and they were talking about the fact that Donald MacLeod was talking about the hardest thing to believe in the Bible. What's the hardest thing to believe in the Bible? And he said the hardest thing to believe in the Bible is that God loves you. And yet that's the truth that holds the whole Bible together. And that's the thread running right through redemptive history that God's heart is for you. God's heart is for you. And that means that you're precious to him. That means that he wants you near to him. That means he understands everything that you are going through. That means that not one tear ever falls from your eye without him seeing it. And that means that he wants to pour an eternity of love and peace and care and goodness into you. God's heart for you is a heart of indescribable, unending, unstoppable love. And we know that that's true because the cross proves it. The cross proves God's heart for you because on that cross God exposed his own heart. And God handed over his own son and Jesus' heart was crushed and broken, all so that you and I can be healed. And that's the amazing promise of the Gospel. And it's important for us to remember as we close that that reality is something that we can experience now, but that is not going to be fully realized until the day that Jesus takes us home. In other words, not every bruise is healed immediately. And not every tear disappears the minute you start following Jesus. In fact, I've said this before, but I think it's worth saying again that when Revelation describes us reaching heaven and having tears wiped away from our eyes, it's telling us not just that God wipes away our tears, but also that we get there with our tears. And there are many sorrows and difficulties that we will face on that journey until Jesus takes us home. But his ultimate goal for you, for me, for all of us, his heart for us is that all our tears will be wiped away, that all our wounds will be bound up, that all our heartbreak would be healed. That is what the Creator of the universe wants for you. That is what the ultimate reality, who is the explanation of everything, that is what he wants for you. That is how precious you are to him. And so as we go through life, as we experience the joys and sorrows that life can bring, never forget that at every step your heart is in God's hands, holding you, keeping you, guarding you. His heart for you is one of everlasting, eternal, unbreakable love. Amen.