

Heads Hearts Hopes Part 2

Where your Treasure is

On Wednesday night Marcos Baghdatis played in a third round match at the Australian Open Tennis. He lost the first two sets. And things weren't going all that well in the third.

At the change of ends Marcos went to his seat. He sat down. And proceeded to smash his racquet on the pavement until it was a mangled wreck.

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He calmly handed it to the ballboy, who I presume will put it up on ebay and make lots of money.

These guys have got plenty of racquets though. So he just picked up another one that was sitting on his bag. For a minute he looked like he was done. But then he began smashing that one to pieces as well.

He threw it on the ground.

With the whole stadium watching. Marcos grabbed a third racquet. This one still had the plastic cover on it. And he started smashing that one up as well.

After he'd smashed FOUR RACQUETS. Marcos went back onto the court. And as it turns out.... he won the next game. How about that!

The response was interesting. Tennis Australia had to say now now and they hit him with a fine that was less than the cost of replacing his equipment. Channel seven delightedly replayed the footage – over and over. And the other players had nothing but empathy. Said they often felt like doing exactly the same thing.

And of course you have to say. That's not good. But there's a fine line. Baghdatis is a Cypriot and we love him here. We love him BECAUSE we love his passion. On the big points he beats his chest. He throws himself around the court. We love the fact he puts his heart into it. We love the passion.

But it's that same passion. That same desire at work. Smashing the racquets. When it goes a bit pear shaped.

We're in week two of our three week series. Heads hearts and hopes. We're having a look at those aspects of the new life that the good news of Jesus brings. Last week we did the heads. This week it's hearts. That are transformed by the gospel.

And biblical picture of the heart in so many ways reflects the ways we speak about it. The heart's the place those desires come from.

Not exclusively. It's not just pure emotion attributed to the heart. You can understand with your heart, you can have a heart of wisdom. Conversely you can love things with your mind. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, MIND and strength. That's the command. So the bible doesn't treat these things simplistically or completely separately.

The heart can be anxious or envious or heavy. It can be pierced literally or figuratively. The heart can be proud or arrogant, it can be soft or hard, it's even said to have attitudes. There's a whole range of things. But in essence. Biblically your heart is the seat of those desires. And that's what Jesus picks up on in our passage.

Andy Roddick made an interesting point in his press conference the other night. He had to retire with an injury against Lleyton Hewitt. They asked him how do you feel about that. And he said. Well when you sit back and you look at it with some perspective. In other words. When you THINK about it carefully. He said you take it in your stride. You take the long view. But he said at the same time the competitor in me wants to smash something.

He's identified this internal fight for control. The desires at work.

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But here's the question. What would God have us do with those passions? Bearing in mind. A courtside temper tantrum's a fairly trivial thing. Yet those same desires are responsible for things far worse. Broken relationships. Not just broken racquets. They're responsible for physical violence. To get what you want. Paedophilia. All sorts of sexual crimes. To satisfy desire. And fraud. Deception. It's those MOTIVES that can make us do all sorts of MAD things.

So what do you do with them?

One solution is the Buddhist and stoic approach. To minimize or remove those heart desires. So...you want something. You can't have it. It makes you angry. That's a problem. You love something. It's taken away. You feel pain. And we can't have that. The problem is desire. Your desires are the root cause of all that stuff. The solution. Take it away. Remove desire. So it doesn't matter if you can't have it. It can't hurt you if it's taken away. That's the logic. Not sure how viable that really is. Given the way we're made. But I can see where that's coming from. Problem is..... Remove desire...you remove joy. You remove celebration. And satisfaction. Excitement. Anticipation. Those things that make up life. And even things like pain...at least you know you're alive if you're feeling it. If we're made to have those things then it's de-humanising when you think about it. To remove them. You take out the heart's desire. And replace it with the almighty goal of absolute nothingness. Doesn't really do it for me. But I guess at least you don't break racquets.

That's one option. Not Jesus option though. You'll see as Luke records for us here. Jesus opts more for redirection. Rather than removal. Of those desires. In fact. It's a bit the other way. You could almost say Jesus is inflammatory here. As he speaks to his disciples about the desires of the heart.

Two examples here. The first one verse 29. He says there

Don't set your heart on food. On what you'll eat and drink. Don't worry about that. Don't set your heart on THAT. The pagans run after that sort of thing. And God knows you need them anyway. So don't set your heart on food and drink.

BUT seek HIS KINGDOM. See the redirect there. Seek his kingdom instead. And these things will be given to you as well.

See how it's working there. It's like. You're about to jump in to the volkswagon. You've got one foot in the door. And Jesus says. Hang on. ...woah woah woah. Point -----Mercedes.

What are you doing? Volkswagon. Mercedes. No brainer.

Desire something really desirable. Seek that. That's Jesus advice here to his disciples.

Second example. Verse 33 there. He says. Sell your possessions and give to the poor.

That's radical teaching. All that stuff you've worked you whole life for. Do a mental inventory of it all. All that stuff. Give it away.

Jesus must be teaching about altruism.

And if I'm really to do that. That's going to be hard. Number one it's going to be hard because I have to part with my stuff. The stuff that's been the goal of my desires. The stuff that forms the basis for my security if I'm honest. And my importance. That's hard. It's also hard because I've got so much of it!

I've got a house full of stuff. Even the garage is overflowing. You know it when you can't get it all in one removal truck. Jesus says sell your possessions. It's going to take a while!

It's more blessed to give than to receive. That's what Jesus says elsewhere. But that's not his point here.

Let's see the point. It's the same as the first one.

He says. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted.

It's the same idea. He's not squashing desire. He's just redirecting to something better.

In London the boxing day sales had PRADA and GUCCI handbags at crazily low prices. And scuffles were breaking out as ladies were fighting over these handbags. Because of the five letters on the badge.

And Jesus simply makes the point here. That stuff you're treasuring. It's not worth as much as you're valuing it. It's got a shelf life. It wears out. It breaks down the day after the warranty runs out. It gets lifted by thieves. You know that he says.

So don't rate it so highly. More than that. Go after stuff that really is worth treasuring.

Purses in heaven. That won't wear out.

There's this ad on TV for supercheap where the dad gets a gift card for Christmas. And he's over the moon. He starts thinking about all the things he could get with this gift card. The kid says dad it's a gift card. And the dad says it's not just a gift card son. He says "this could be ANYTHING".

Now they need a disclaimer on that ad. This could be anything – well, yeah, anything up to 50 bucks. Which isn't that much. This could be anything....in stock.

Because gift cards are like money. They're limited. Even Sir Richard Branson has a finite amount of the stuff.

And Jesus says provide for yourselves treasure in heaven that won't be exhausted like that. Where no thief comes and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is. There your heart will be also.

So there's a problem with what our hearts desire. And again. Same as with our thinking. The problem stems from sin. The sinful mind we saw last week. Is hostile to God. And becomes futile in its thinking and depraved. And the heart goes the same way.

Paul lists the effects separately but in the same vein there in Romans 1.

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Romans 1:21 ²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their FOOLISH HEARTS were darkened.

Futile thinking and foolish and dark hearts. Which again, is a lousy exchange. A massive backtrade.

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The glory of the immortal God. For images made to look like mortal man, and bird and animals a reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful DESIRES OF THEIR HEARTS to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

Jeremiah has a go at describing the effects of sin on the heart. He puts it this way in Jeremiah 17.

Jeremiah's lamenting the never ending sins of the people of Israel. And he says.

Jeremiah 17:9 ⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

The actions might be the outward expression. But the problem's deeply rooted.

I've got to say. It is a bit handy when it comes to little kids. You can use it against them. For example if they don't want to drink something. I've been known to take it and pretend it's mine and they can't have it. All of a sudden it's a different story. Want that. Want that. I'm sure that's not good parenting. But it's there in the heart of even the 2 year old. And it's just a bit better disguised if you're older.

You only want something. Because someone else has it. That house, that car.

That boyfriend/girlfriend/husband/wife, job, coffee machine whatever it is. My driving desire for wanting it. Same as the 2 year old. Is the fact that someone else has it. That's why I want it. And get this. Then. If I manage to get it. Then I don't want it. That's sick!

That's the foolish dark heart. And the solution for hearts turned away from God. Is to turn back. That's What God says he's going to do. Through Jeremiah. He says.

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Jeremiah 24:6-7 ⁶ My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. ⁷ I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.

That's the hope of Israel. Rejected by God. Exiled. Because of their incessant idolatry. That God would do something in their hearts. And so Jesus turns up as a Jew among Jews. Saying repent. Turn back. To hard hearted people.

Turn to God with all your HEART. Seek first HIS KINGDOM. Store up treasure in heaven.

Such a radical change. So radical that when Nicodemus comes to Jesus. Jesus says. You must be born again. So transformed in your thinking. So changed in your heart. That it's like being born again. And at the same time so impossible. We need God to do it in us.

John Piper who some of us went to hear at the convention centre last year. His driving passion is this particular aspect. Not just of Jesus' teaching. But the whole bible.

He reckons Christians settle for mere obedience. Or reluctant compliance. As if God's most pleased when we're most compliant. We think God's doing cartwheels when we've fulfilled our duties.

When we know. WE're not even pleased with that. It's hardly satisfying to have a husband or wife. Serving you and doing things for you out of mere duty. Or parents for that matter. There's your dinner I cooked it because I had to.

So Piper says. Here's the heart of the Gospel. And it stems out of what God's like. His character. His being. Now, he's written a book called desiring God, which is 350 odd pages. And I'm trying to reduce that down to a sentence or two. But he says.

Because of God's uniqueness. Which is how he describes God's holiness. Because God's unique in the universe. Because he made it. He stands outside of it. Because of what he's like in his character. Because of those things. By definition. God is the most valuable thing you can ever have. Everything else is derivative from him. All things made. All beauty. All justice and truth. Every good thing. Emanates back to him. He's the source of everything valuable.

And because he's so valuable. He ought to be valued for who he is by those he made. So for instance. If you worship the sun. S U N. If you worship the sun as if it were God. You're putting the sun in God's place. Because he alone is ultimately valuable.

Which by the way is the reason it's ok for God to call forth praise for himself. To self glorify which seems a bit strange because it's wrong for us. But it's not for

God simply because there is no-one else more worthy of praise. And if God did praise something else above himself. He'd be guilty of idolatry because he'd be valuing something else more valuable than himself.

And so we ought to value him as he is. We ought to treasure him for who he is. Above everything else. Because he's ultimately valuable. In fact God's glory is the point of the gospel. Jesus comes as God to be a man. Makes the supreme sacrifice. Dies in the place of sinners. Not for the sake of compliance. Not just so people will turn up at church every now and then. Not for dutiful obedience. But so God would be glorified as people turn to him in repentance and faith. So we'll value him for what he's worth. Delight in him. Sing his praises. Do his will. Because we WANT TO. Because he's our treasure.

And not purses that wear out or careers that end or money that runs out or whatever else. Which doesn't mean those things don't have any value. Just not ultimate value.

So here's Piper's mantra. HE says.

God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

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Now that's a sort of systematic summary of the whole bible. And you find that idea over and over again. That's what Jesus has just said in what we've looked at this morning. Seek first HIS Kingdom.

It's that ordering of desire. Store up treasure IN HEAVEN.

Where your treasure is. That's where your heart is. Jeremiah.

They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.

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Psalm 37:4 ⁴ Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

So that leaves us with the obvious question. Where's your treasure? Have you assessed the value of things rightly? It's funny, it's not as though we're not used to doing that. We'll deliberate over which packet of biscuits to buy at the supermarket as we compare the price per hundred grams. We'll search the internet to get the best price on something.

Yet maybe we haven't thought critically about what we're being sold in the big scheme of things. You can't take the perishable into eternity. The call of the gospel is to turn to Jesus with all your heart and follow him. To desire what's really desirable.