

BFF426 A Circumcised Heart

Scott Moore: Welcome to the "Building Faith Families" podcast with Steve Demme. I'm your host, Scott Moore. Thanks for joining us today. Good morning, Steve. How are you today?

Steve: I am recovering. How are you?

Scott: I'm good. Sounds like you had a little too much activity this weekend.

Steve: My wife and I try to get away to our little place up in the Poconos once a month. Even though life with John is a treat, that guy cracks us up all the time. He's a blessing, but we still need two-time. We need time for the two of us to reconnect, and we did again this weekend.

We went on a long walk with the dogs, and we did projects around the cabin. We're tired from all of it, but we're together in a special way. I got in the truck on the way home last night, and said, I had a wonderful time with you at this place.

She looked at me and acknowledged we need these times, and we do. She's the one that's smart and encouraged us to do this several years ago. We did do a little bit too much physical labor and I'm paying the price this morning.

Scott: Fun.

Steve: This morning, we're going to talk about something that I'd be willing to bet you may have never heard a sermon on this topic. I don't think I have. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for every word of scripture that is inspired and profitable for us to learn from and to listen to. This topic the more I study it, seems to be prevalent throughout scripture, and I pray that You'll help us to have ears to hear what Your Spirit is saying. Help us to have hearts that are teachable and soft. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Scott: Amen.

Steve: My namesake, Stephen, preached an incredible sermon in Acts 7. There's a couple of these in scripture where the speaker rehearses Israel's history, and this is one of them. It goes all the way from the beginning of the chapter way down to the fifties. 50 verses. I'm going to jump in at the 45th verse.

"Our fathers, in turn, brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. It was until the days of David who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob, but it was Solomon who built a house for Him."

"Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, 'Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. What kind of house will you build for Me, says the Lord, or what is the place of My rest? Did not My hand make all these things?'"

Now, up until that point, it is a rehearsal. A history lesson. It's an inspired overview of how God has dealt with His people. He was talking about David and Solomon and

building a temple and the tabernacle, and it's amazing. But something shifted. There's a tone that everything shifts before the 51st verse.

Acts 7:51 says, "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you." Wow.

We shifted gears really quickly here. We know that Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit. He was angelic in appearance. Even when they were stoning him, he looked up and said, "Father, forgive them."

I'll read it again.

'You stiff-necked people -- another version says, stubborn -- uncircumcised in heart and ears. You always resist the Holy Spirit. "The Holy Spirit, who was speaking through Stephen, knew it because he was the one that they had been resisting.

Acts 7:52, "Which of the prophets did not your fathers not persecute? They killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, Whom you have now betrayed and murdered. You who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

I think we all know what happens after that. When they heard these things, they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. He, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right-hand of God, and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right-hand of God. They cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him."

I don't know about you, but when I'm reading that, I sense that he looked at them and said, "Everything I've said is accurate and so is this, just like your fathers, you have not changed one wit. You killed Jesus, but why not? You've been killing the prophets since the beginning of time because you are stiff-necked, uncircumcised in heart and ears. You always resist the Holy Spirit."

This is the condition of Israel all the way through. He's basically saying to them, why should it be a surprise when you killed the Son of God because you've killed everybody else that God has sent and you've resisted the Holy Spirit from the beginning.

I'm going to now go back to the beginning a little bit and read what Moses said beginning in Deuteronomy 10:12, "And now, Israel, what does Jehovah your God require of you but to fear Jehovah your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve Jehovah your God with all your heart and with all your soul, to keep the commandments of Jehovah and His statue to which I command you this day for your good."

"Behold unto Jehovah, thy God belongs heaven, and the heaven of heavens, the earth, with all that is therein. Only Jehovah had a delight in your fathers to love them, and He chose their seed after them, even you above all peoples as at this day."

Man, I could have that verse right up on the wall. I could put it on my screensaver. It's a beautiful verse. God's love for His people. Then the 16th verse. We see it again. Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.

Look. Your root problem is you need God to circumcise your heart. You need to stop being stubborn. You need to stop being resistant of God and His Word and His prophets and His Spirit. Moses continues, "For Jehovah your God, He is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, the mighty and the terrible, Who regards not persons nor takes reward. He does execute justice for the fatherless and widow and loves the sojourner in giving him food and drink."

He's wonderful, this God that you're resisting. Then he says, "Love, therefore, the sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall fear Jehovah your God. You shall serve Him, and to Him shall you cleave, and by His name shall you swear. He is your praise. He is your God that has done for you these great and terrible things which your eyes have seen."

You've seen Him do this. Cleave to Him. Love Him. Swear in His name. Love the sojourners. He's appealing to them. But the key verse is right in the middle. You're not going to be able to do that until you circumcise the foreskin of your heart and be no more stubborn and stiff-necked.

2 Chronicles 30, Hezekiah is reforming the nation of Israel. He's reaching out to everybody, Israel, Judah, and the northern kingdom, Ephraim and Manasseh.

It says in the 30th Chapter, the first verse, "Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh that they should come to the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem to keep the Passover unto Jehovah, the God of Israel."

Then there's some specifics, and then in the sixth verse, "You, children of Israel, turn again unto Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that he may return to the remnant that are escaped of you out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. Be not like your fathers and like your brethren who trespassed against Jehovah, the God of your fathers, so that he gave them up to desolation as you see."

Now be not stiff-necked as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto Jehovah. Enter into His sanctuary, which He has sanctified for you forever. Serve Jehovah your God that His fierce anger may turn away from you."

Stephen tells him, this is a problem they've had since the beginning. You guys are like your fathers. You have trespassed. You are stiff-necked. You have not yielded yourselves to Jehovah.

I'm going to tuck this in right here. Romans 2:28, "No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart by the spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man, but from God."

This is a common theme throughout scripture that we need to have our heart changed. We need to circumcise and let the Spirit of God work deep in our heart and help us to not resist Him, but to yield to Him. OK. This making sense?

Scott: Yeah.

Steve: I've got two more passages, but I'm going to let you comment before I finish up.

Scott: My big fear in reading this is I'm not sure which side I'd be on. Even with the Holy Spirit, there are times when I'm so resistant that I'm like, is my heart circumcised? I pray for that. There are times when it's like, I don't think I would have killed Stephen, but I don't know.

Steve: It's a great response because, I think, I don't know if I've ever told you about the rakes and the shovels.

Scott: I don't think so.

Steve: OK. My wife's relative loved to have illustrations when he preached. We can remember 30 years ago sermons that he preached because there was always some kind of a physical component to it.

One service he brought in a rake and a shovel before he preached. He said, you know, oftentimes, when we hear somebody preach we could be saying, this is really good for the people in my church. I wish my friend would listen to this. All the world needs to hear this. That's using the shovel. That's when the truth is given to you, and instead of taking it in yourself, you shovel it out to everybody you think needs to hear this sermon.

He was encouraging us to use the rake first. We need to pull it into ourself and apply it to ourself. I'm the same as you. When I hear this kind of stuff, I said, God, help me to have a circumcised heart. I don't want to be caught. Right?

Scott: Amen.

Steve: I think it's very wise. So let's use the rake first. Let's take this into our self. I've been chewing on this for some time, and I've been thinking, what does it mean to have a circumcised heart? What does it mean to not be stubborn and to not resist? I think the answer might be found in Romans 1. I'm going to read this. This is the 18th verse. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made, so they are without excuse."

I'm going to pause there before this next verse. I have trouble when people tell me they're an atheist. If I know them, I might say "No, you're a liar." God's word says everybody knows there's a God.

Since the creation of the world, by His very creation, they are without excuse. Everybody is plain to them, He says. God has shown it to them. This is obvious. So there's no excuse.

Yet, it says in the 21st verse, "For although they knew God," now think about those Israelites. They not only saw God in creation. They saw God deliver them from the Egyptians. They saw a flaming pillar. They saw a cloud. They saw a rock that was following them, giving them water in a dry wilderness. They saw manna falling from heaven for 40 years.

They saw that their shoes did not wear out. They saw miracle after miracle after miracle. They were without excuse. Although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things, like they made that stupid cow. Anyway, point is, they knew God. They did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him.

I think the first thing that we can do is honor Him as God. I can't imagine every morning getting up and eating manna and not seeing God. I can't imagine drinking pure water from the rock, which is Christ, and not think about God. Seeing the pillar, seeing the fire. Yet somehow they saw these things, but they didn't give thanks to God, and they didn't see them as coming from God.

Even Jesus, when He gave them bread in John 6, He says, it was not Moses that gave you this bread. It was My Father who gives you this bread. You guys need to open your eyes. This is God. They didn't honor Him as God. They didn't give God credit, or they didn't give thanks to Him. Giving thanks is a way to give God credit.

That's why Paul says, give thanks in all things. Rejoice always. It's the mark of a circumcised heart is to recognize that God is God. It's not circumstance. It's not chance. It's not good luck. It's honoring God as God and giving thanks to Him.

This is something that I'll tell you what I do. I pray for God more and more to give me a circumcised heart and ears, and help me to honor Him as God and give thanks to Him. Since I've been doing this priestly discipline for almost two years now, I give thanks more than I ever have.

It started way back in 2018 with Psalm 100 to come into His presence with thanksgiving. I have been spending time and being intentional like never before, but honoring God as God and giving thanks to Him helps to keep our mind from becoming futile. It helps us to honor Him and give Him His due.

There's an incredible promise back in Ezekiel 36:24-28. He's talking to this nation of Israel. He's talking to his chosen people. He's talking to the people that have been dispersed among all the nations of the world. This is people that have rejected God, uncircumcised hearts, stiff neck, stubborn, the whole package.

He says this, "I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land." OK. But that's outside. That's physical stuff. He's going to bring them back to their land.

Then He says, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols, I will cleanse you, and I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."

He knows what we read before in Romans. No one is a Jew who is one outwardly. Circumcision is not outward and physical. A Jew is one inwardly. Circumcision is a matter of the heart by the spirit. He says, "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."

Then he says, "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be My people, and I will be your God."

You want to talk about good news? That is good news. I saw that passage many years ago, and there's been so many times that I've asked God to give me a heart of flesh. What do you think?

Scott: If you keep reading in Romans after they knew God, they neither glorified Him nor gave thanks to Him, and they made idols and worshiped them. Then it says, therefore, God gave them over in their sinful desires... we're seeing that lived out in denominations of the Christian church today. There are certain ones that have abandoned scripture and the sinful things that are listed there in Romans 1 are happening. We need to remember this. We're not immune from this ourselves and we need to beg the Holy Spirit to circumcise our hearts.

Steve: Let's pray.

Father, thank You for Stephen's anointed message. He saw their issue. They knew their history, but their hearts had never been changed since they were hard in the times of Moses, they were hard in the times of Hezekiah. Ezekiel had to tell him, look, this is the issue. Paul reminded them, Jews are not physical and outward and with signs and laws, and I know what you're doing to your flesh, but the real issue is the heart.

I pray for each of us listening today. Give us ears to hear what your spirit is saying to us. Circumcise our hearts. Take out anything that's stony and replace it with a heart of flesh. Help it to be said of us that we are not stiff-necked, but we are yielding, that we can yield to the Holy Spirit. We can say amen to Your leadings. Keep us from being stiff-neck and unbelieving, and help us to be soft and believing.

Help us to be the exact opposite of what these people were accused of, and we can't do it without Your help, and so we ask You to do it for us. In Jesus name, Amen.

Scott: Amen. That's our show for this week, folks. Thanks for joining us for the Building Faith Families podcast with Steve Demme. If you have a question for the show, email Steve at spdemme@Gmail.com. If you have a question for me, you can reach me at scott@unsocializedmedia.com. Thanks for joining us. Have a great week.