

“Hardening of the Oughteries”

The word of God has brought hope to the hurting, light to the lost and led millions into the saving grace of Jesus Christ. It is also misused at times to get everything from vast television audiences to relationship control and even in times past world political power. When I was a little boy I can remember hearing about all the things I ought to do. “You ought to sit there and be quiet while the preacher speaks. You ought to stop running in the fellowship hall, you ought to read more of your Bible.”

As a young husband and father, I got another good dose of the oughts. “You ought to have those kids at all the church functions. You ought to make your wife teach Sunday School. You ought to get those church people off my back.” Talk about being between a rock and a hard place.

As an aging Senior Pastor, the oughts I feel seem no better. When I am around those in the liturgical church, you know the robes, candles, acolytes bunch, I feel like I ought to be more orderly. When I am among the very conservative. I have felt like I ought to be more holy and do more witnessing. When I am among the very liberal, I have felt like I ought to be more accepting of lots of things and I ought to do more for the poor. Around charismatics I have always felt like I ought to have more dramatic experiences of the Holy Spirit and in fact, like I ought to have more than everything.

Around here I sometimes get the sense from some that I ought to be in the office more, ought to visit more, ought to take better care of myself, ought to pray longer, louder or

shorter and quieter. I ought to be more engaged with the children's ministry, the junior high and senior high youth group, I ought to take a few more people to brunch on Sunday after church. I ought to teach a couple more Bible studies.

With all the ways I ought to be better I think what I really have is a case of "Hardening of the Oughteries." You might understand that too. There is no shortage of those who have a grand plan for someone else's life. I know...I ought to move on.

Sometimes shame based people are attracted to shame based churches because it "feels" right to them. But, please hear this next statement. It is a belief that I have held passionately for some time. It is a message that I hope you take away with you as we wrap up this series on shame and how to begin and perpetuate the process of shucking that shame from your life. The message is this: If shame is your issue, you need to be far, far away from religious condemnation and cling to the good news of grace.

Our scripture passage for today is 1 Samuel 16:7. This verse will show us through God's instruction to Samuel how we are not to use the "oughteries" to navigate through life but what is really the "heart of the matter."⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Man looks at the outward appearance. What is the outward appearance? The oughteries. But God looks on the heart. I hope that if you have learned anything in this series that you have learned that shame based systems operate on performance. Shame based systems operate on outward appearance. For a time, usually a short time, any person can alter the

outside appearance or outside performance...for a short time. What we are convinced by those who shame us, we ought to do, can be done...for a short time but eventually what is in here...wins out. What is in here...worms it's way past the appearance and past the oughteries eventually. So ultimately we are left with what God sees and that is what God wants to change...the heart. So if that is what God is looking...the heart, what is he looking for? If, what God is looking for in your heart is there you are well on your way to a grace filled life and a hardening of the oughteries. Let me use the person whom God says in 1 Samuel 16:7 that he has rejected, Saul, who scripture records stood a head taller than all the others around him and his antithesis in the New Testament, Zacchaeus to help us get past appearance and to the heart.

In Luke 19, verses 1-4 read, "Jesus entered Jericho & was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector & was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead & climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see Him, since Jesus was coming that way."

I wonder how many of us have ever stood before a mirror and wished that we had a different face or a different body? Now, you don't need to raise your hands. But if you can honestly say that you have never wished for a different face or body, you are among the minority, because most of us, at one time or another, have wished that we looked differently than we do.

Even beautiful movie stars like Meryl Streep & Christy Brinkly have publicly admitted to misgivings about their physical appearance. Now if they have misgivings, where does that leave the rest of us? There is such a tremendous emphasis in our country on

appearances that it affects almost everybody. Just turn on your TV any morning & you'll see all kinds of aerobic & exercise programs, advertisements for the latest miracle diets, health spas, plastic surgeons, & low-calorie or fat-free foods. Since "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," it is not always clear what is beautiful & what is not. If you'll look back in history, up until the 20th Century much of the world thought that the most beautiful women were those who had plenty of meat on their bones. It has only been in recent generations that western civilization has begun to place so much emphasis on being thin. Wait a minute! Maybe the answer to our problem is not more dieting, but just to change our definition of beauty back to what it once was. Then most of us could go on our merry way feeling very satisfied about ourselves.

In parts of Africa, a beautiful woman is one whose lip has been stretched out so far that she can insert a 12" round disk in it. The Mayan Indians believed that beauty was found in having a narrow, elongated head. So when a baby was born, while its skull was still soft & pliable, they tied boards to both sides of its head. They bound them together tightly, gradually increasing the tension to produce a head that was long & narrow. They also admired crossed eyes. So they dangled a marble before the child to get the child to focus on the marble & become cross-eyed. In the Mayan culture, beauty was a person with an elongated head & crossed-eyes. What is our definition of beauty? Whatever it is, we seem to place a tremendous emphasis on it.

The Bible says that Saul was without equal in all the nation of Israel, and that he stood a head taller than anybody else. So if you were going to describe Saul's life in modern day terms, what kind of guy would he be? Captain of the football team? King of the prom?

Heart throb of every girl at school? Saul succeeds in everything that he tries to do. Then he is the King of Israel, the ruler over all his people. Never has he experienced rejection.

In contrast to Saul, notice Zacchaeus. We are told that he is a short man. That's interesting, because the Bible seldom says anything about height or physical appearance. Anthropologists tell us that the average man's height back in N.T. days was 5'3", much shorter than today. So when the Bible points out that Zacchaeus was short, it means that Zacchaeus must have really been short. Some scholars suggest that Zacchaeus may even have been a dwarf. So here is Zacchaeus. Can you imagine what his life must have been like? Zacchaeus probably grew up with a chip on his shoulder. And when he became an adult, & the Roman Empire was looking for a chief tax-collector, Zacchaeus jumped at the chance. Because you see, to be chief tax-collector meant that you could "get even," you could "rip off" your own people. Zacchaeus didn't care, because no one liked him, anyway. He didn't owe them anything. They had always rejected him. So he took the job, & succeeded at it. He found himself making lots of money at the expense of his own countrymen. He built himself a big house, and became very wealthy. Soon he started exercising his power over other people. He bought friendship, inviting people to his parties, coercing them to come. Because if they didn't come perhaps he would tax them even more severely in the future. So Zacchaeus became a big little man in Jericho. He was important because he had made himself important.

Now for a moment I want us to think again about 1 Samuel 16:7 where God says, "Man may look at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart." God looks beyond your nose that is too long, your feet that are too big, your ears that stick out too much. He looks

beyond whether you are too tall or too short or too heavy or too thin. He looks beyond all the things you ought to be and all the things you ought to do and looks inside the heart and He sees what is there. So what is he looking for?

First, HE IS LOOKING FOR A HEART THAT WILL REFLECT HIS LOVE.

Listen to vs. 5 in Luke 19. It says, "When Jesus reached the spot, He looked up & said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.' So he came down at once & welcomed Him gladly." Can you read between the lines? I wonder if maybe Jesus is the very first person who has ever invited himself to the home of Zacchaeus? Others may have come because they were coerced to come. But Jesus could have been the very first who ever said, "Zacchaeus, I want to spend the day with you."

And notice how Zacchaeus responded? He came shinnying down that tree as fast as he could, and it says "he welcomed Him gladly." For the first time in his life, someone showed love & attention to this little, rejected man. Somebody reached out to him and said, "You count. You amount to something." So Zacchaeus welcomed him gladly. He was like a sponge, soaking up that love. When Jesus reached out to him in love, his heart was ready to receive, to be warmed by it, and to be changed by it. When God looks into our hearts He is looking for a heart that will accept His love. God is no respecter of persons. It doesn't make any difference if you are tall or short, fat or thin. It matters not what you ought to have done or what you did do. He just wants a heart that is ready to receive His love, and reflect His love to others.

Secondly, God is looking for a pure heart. Listen to vs. 9. It says, "Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.'"

Boy, those must have been good words to Zacchaeus! "This man, too, is a son of Abraham." He had been rejected by his own people. He had never felt a part of anything. Nobody had ever included him. Now Jesus says, "You are a son of Abraham, too." And then Jesus announces His mission. Isn't it interesting that Jesus announced his mission after His conversation with Zacchaeus? He says, "For the Son of Man came to seek & to save what was lost." "Zacchaeus, today salvation has come to your house. Today you have been cleansed of all the impurities in your life."

It's hard to be pure today. Someone said that they could remember when our parents used to think that the movies were clean and the air was dirty. Today we're so engrossed in cleaning up the air and we completely ignore the filth that being piped into our homes heads and hearts on a daily basis. We hear it in everyday conversations. It is hard to be pure today. But, purity of heart is most about our desire and less of performance. King David is called "a man after God's own heart." His performance was often suspect but his desire? He wanted to be something different. He strove to be different. His heart was pure.

Thirdly, God is looking for commitment. Listen to vs. 8. It says, "But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.'" Now, that's commitment, isn't it?

So many times we sit around with hearts full of love, and souls that have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and we allow our commitment to waste away. We get moldy, sitting in church pews, not exercising the spiritual muscle God has given us. God has given

us wonderful news to share with all the rest of the world, and we almost never share it, almost never tell anybody about what Christ has done for us. The result is that our commitment begins to die.

If God has done something wonderful for you, it only stands to reason that you would want to share it. Zacchaeus did! He said, "I'm not going to sit around the house any more. I'm not going to keep ripping people off. I'm going to give half my wealth to help the poor. And if I've cheated anybody, I'll give them 4 times as much as I took from them." He wants everybody to know what has happened, how his heart has been changed, and how his life is different. He is committed to making that known.

I like the story about Father Jim. Father Jim was the head of an orphanage, he had a great ability to make people feel good about themselves. If there was a little kid with unruly hair, he had the ability to make that child believe that everybody wanted unruly hair. If a kid had big feet, why he made him think that everybody envied him, that it was the "in" thing to have big feet. He just had the ability to make everybody feel good about themselves, regardless of their physical appearance.

Well, one day when Father Jim was out buying groceries, the social worker brought by a new boy to be cared for in the orphanage, a little boy about 9 years old who had a really ugly birthmark on the side of his face. The kid had been obviously abused, nobody seemed to love or accept him, and he was filled with hostility. And when she left him, he began cursing her and everybody around him. Then he went over to the corner, sat down and sulked. He wouldn't talk to anybody, not even the other kids.

The kids stood around, wondering what Father Jim would do when he came back. Finally, they heard his old station wagon pull up. They all rushed to the door, greeting him, hugging his legs as they always did. Father Jim walked into the room and there was this little boy crouched in the corner, with the ugly birthmark on his face. Father Jim said, "Well, what do we have here?" Someone said, "The social worker just brought him by."

"Well, well," said Father Jim. He walked over to that little boy, knelt down beside him. Then he swooped him up in his arms and kissed him right on that birthmark. And all the kids started clapping, because they knew that if Father Jim kissed the birthmark it was all right. It made it beautiful, just because Father Jim said it was. Friends, that is what God has done. He has covered us completely so that He doesn't see the ugly parts of us any more. We are beautiful in God's sight. In him is no shame only love and grace.

If you're here this morning and you are experiencing the loneliness of rejection, then I want you to know that God looks beyond all those things that people might consider ugly, unattractive, shameful. He looks at your heart. He looks for love. He looks for purity. And He looks for commitment.

If you have those things, you're beautiful in God's sight. If you don't have them, God wants to take you in His arms, the same way that Father Jim took the little boy in his, and make give them to you. It's not about what you ought to do, it's about what God through Jesus has already done.