The heart is deceitful

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[0:00] Let us now turn to the passage we read in the book of Jeremiah, chapter 17. And let us read together again in verses 9 and 10.

Jeremiah chapter 17 at verse 9. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? I the Lord search the heart. I try the reins even to give every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings.
Sometimes the prophet Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. He was a man who loved his people dearly.
But he had a message for them that they did not want to receive. And he found himself persecuted by his own people and even the people from the very place that he came from.
[1:10] He was the prophet who covered the reign of the last four kings before the captivity. Now the message of the book of Jeremiah, we could almost say that it is in the first verse of this chapter itself.

Certainly that a great bit of the burden of his preaching was as we have in verse 1 of chapter 17. The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron and with a point of a diamond.
It is graven upon the table of their heart and upon the horns of your altars. Now this is of course a day in the communion season when we seek to humble ourselves before God.
To regain a sense of our own sin and of our own guilt in the sight of God. To regain a sense of our own corruption and of the great need that we have of coming to God in confession of sin and in seeking repentance.
Now these words in verses 9 and 10 are very well known. The heart is deceitful above all things and so on.
[2:41] I want tonight to divide this up into three things. And the first thing I want to address is the mystery of the human heart.

The mystery of the human heart. The question is asked here, who can know it? Who can reach it? Who can get to the deepest parts of the heart?
Even of their own heart. There's a man some years ago who was in actual fact Secretary General of the United Nations. Now as far as I know he wasn't a Christian but he was a very wise man.
And he wrote some of his thoughts in a book. They were called his markings. And one of these has always stayed with me. It was just simply this.
The longest journey is the journey inwards. There is so much wisdom in that. Who can know their own heart?
[3:48] Now first of all, a word about the heart. We all of course find ourselves in great difficulty when people tease us. Because as Christians we talk about the heart.

And they say to us, oh but the heart is just that fleshy pump which pumps away there in your chest. And we of course have a completely different concept of heart.
Now the reason for that is really fairly plain. And we'll come across it later again tonight. In that the Hebrew people had this way of associating certain psychological and mental and spiritual functions with certain of the physical organs in their body.
That is how all this about the heart, how it arose. And the heart to them was the seat of the decision making.
The seat of the thoughts. Where thoughts were initiated. This was the place where sometimes we wonder, don't we? A thought has come into our heads and we say, where on earth did it come from?
[5:02] Sometimes indeed we are just absolutely shocked at the thoughts which come into our heads. And we ask ourselves, where did it come from? And of course it comes from what we call

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the heart.

It comes from that centre of our being where thoughts are initiated. And indeed where choices are the framework for choice.
The thing which really drives the will is the heart. So it says here about the heart, who can know it?
Now our own experience of our hearts, if we have experienced any self-searching at all, our experience of it will be that it is just like a reservoir of wickedness.
As if there was no end to it. I remember when I was a very small boy, there was a certain peat road in the village.
[6:16] And at a certain point in that peat road, there was always this nice round hole. And it was always full of clear water with water flowing from it.

When you looked closely, you would see in the sandy bottom, you would see the water pushing up the sand all the time, never ending.
And I used to ask and I used to wonder, where does all that water come from? And I remember nobody being able to give me a very satisfactory answer. It just kept coming and coming and coming and coming.
That is the way with the heart. The trouble is that that water was clear and clean and pure and drinkable.
But the waters that come out of the spring of the heart, they're like water out of a poisoned spring. As if they were poisoned constantly.
[7:14] Something, somewhere, constantly injecting its poison into all that proceeds from the heart. I remember once reading about the great Mr. Spurgeon, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, that he said once, you can write my life across the sky, he says, for all to see.

And I remember envying him so much that he was able to do that. That he was so open in all his dealings and all his ways. Then one day I had this thought.
You know, Mr. Spurgeon did not say, you can write my thoughts across the sky. You can write the content of my heart across the sky.
Because even he, I'm sure, wouldn't like that to happen. Neither would any of us. Who of us would say, well, you can write all my thoughts, everything that comes through my heart.
You can write it in the sky for all to see. Because we just can't do that. Because our hearts are such a reservoir. Who can know it?
[8:33] Who can get to the depths of it? And the simple fact is that we can never, we can never know our own hearts.

The more we know about our hearts, the more disappointed we become with our hearts. We, in our Christian lives, we don't have the experience, you know, of our hearts being improved as time goes on.
It seems to be the reverse. Because of our greater insight. Because God, by his spirit, shows us more and more of the sin that is in our hearts.
We can simply never know it. Now, there are two things that we can say about the heart. Two things that are brought before us here.
Now, before I go on to these, I want to make this quite clear. These things are not spoken about particularly wicked people.
[9:45] You understand? It's not talking here about people who are who are extraordinarily wicked and sinful.

What we are talking about here is the normal person. If anybody is normal. Just the average person.
And this is the description of his heart. First of all, it says that it is deceitful above all things.
Just the ordinary person's heart. Deceitful above all things. Now, the word here is it's quite an interesting word.
It is literally translated following on the heel of. You remember the way Jacob got his name because he was grasping the heel of his brother.
[10:50] And he the name came to mean a deceiver. A deceiver. Someone who trips somebody else up.

That is the origin of the word that we have here. it is deceitful above all things. Above all other things.
The heart has the tendency to trip people up. The traitor very often is not out there.

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It is just right in there. The heart is deceitful above above all things. It is the traitor the tripper up the one who catches our heel within ourselves.
We don't have to go searching for sources of evil. We don't have to go searching for evil influences. They are already in us enough and more than we can cope with.
[12:02] so it is first of all deceitful above all things. And then it says desperately wicked. Desperately wicked.

The idea here is of something being incurable. evil. Well you would think you know the day would come when all this flow would come to an end.
You would think it would not be possible for this flow of evil from the heart to go on and on and on and on and rather than reducing in flow it increases in flow.
It reminds me of something that we used to do when we were children. If we found a stream with water flowing along the stream one of the things we loved to do was to build a dam and would take clods of earth and mud and stones and would build a dam to hold the water back.
Then as the level rose of course we would have to start building the dam higher and higher and higher and there would be a rush just to prevent it from breaking. Of course no matter how hard we tried or how hard we worked that dam would burst and it is like that.
[13:37] You know we can perhaps by tremendous application of self control for perhaps a very very short period of time dam this flow from the heart.

But eventually just as sure as that dam broke the dam that you put round your heart it will break because the pressure is there continually.
So the first thing that we say is that the human heart is a mystery. Who can know it? And we have learned these two things about it.
That it is first of all like a tripper up inside. A deceiver inside. And secondly that it is incurable in its wickedness.
secondly we can say this having said that we cannot know that no one can know the human heart we can then say this that God knows the human heart.
[15:05] now that's quite a thought isn't it? Having painted the human heart having painted my own and your heart the way I've done it's quite a thought isn't it?

That God knows it all everything and not only that but God knows it to its end to its depth we cannot no matter how long we how long we spend on that journey inwards as the man was talking about no matter how long we spend on that journey we will never reach the end yet God is there already he knows it he knows it in its depth in its expanse he knows it in all its quality in all its nature in all its poison in all its deceit in all its corruption he knows it God knows the heart
I the Lord search the heart what God searches he knows I the Lord search the heart I try the reins it says here now this is again going back to the idea we had at the beginning about the Hebrews and the way they associated certain psychological functions with the organs with the internal organs they associated the kidneys with the emotions and the word here literally translated is the kidneys and it is as if he was saying the writer was saying that the Lord says I the Lord try kidneys meaning that he tries the emotions he tries the feelings he tests the feelings he tests them to find out what they are really like you know it's so easy isn't it for us to make a great show of emotion sometimes our show of emotion is just entirely on the surface so you know if we are wise we will do a little bit of testing of outward shows of emotion
God does that he tries them he tests them we have to confess they are worth nothing even the greatest shows and expressions of emotions and we deceive with our show and of course the deceit comes from the heart that is where it has its root the heart and the emotions are so closely linked together God says here I the Lord search the heart I try the reins now we live in days where it is very fashionable to have surveys and research done on just about everything surveys on this surveys on that surveys on the next thing and very often what happens in our day is that the enemies of the gospel they use surveys they produce surveys to undermine the gospel many of the surveys that we read about are so disappointing they convince young people for example that this is what everybody is doing that is what the figures show this is what everybody is doing it they like to produce researches and surveys and reports which say things like that of course it is the work of the enemy and we have to recognize anybody can conduct a survey and prove just about anything he wants to prove we live in days of surveys and searches and researches what about this survey that God does on your heart and on mine indeed that he has already done it is it is there because he knows it

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I search the heart he's done his survey he's done his research what would happen if his findings were published how would you feel if God published his research into your heart well I certainly wouldn't like it I wouldn't like it neither would any of us like it because we know that these these results the results of the search would be quite simply very very bad news for all of us but what we do have to remember is this this is what we have to remember most solemnly to put it in very human terms he has the findings in front of him he has them in front of him all his search all his research all his findings they are there in front of you can read them report of you and [22:07] I is on his desk it is before him so there is the mystery of the human heart who can know it then there is God's knowledge of the human heart I the Lord search the heart I try the reins thirdly God will reward according to what he finds even to give every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings sometimes huge amounts of money are spent especially by government agencies on reports and most of these reports are simply put on a shelf and nothing ever happens to them but not this one not this one

God will act on this report this report will never gather dust it will never be shelled because God will act upon it two things are brought before us here that God will do says that he will give every man according to his ways oh how solemn how solemn that is this is reaching your heart and reaching my heart then it will make us tremble it will fill us with fear and with awe that he will give every man according to his ways and we know that an evil heart cannot produce good ways but an evil heart will produce evil ways the second thing second action here is that he will give every man according to the fruit of his doings every life has some kind of fruit every life is made up of doings one kind or another and doings bear fruit doings the habits of our lives there is an old saying which says so I thought and you reap a word sow a word and you reap a deed sow a deed and you reap a habit sow a habit and you reap a destiny our doings our habits what is the fruit of them it is simply true that because the root is evil therefore the fruit will be evil the result the fruit of the doings will be evil now why all this why all this is this simply nothing more than depression without easing is it just putting down without lifting up thanks be to God that that is not the way it is but that this is to lead us to the happiest and greatest and most wonderful thing of all oh this is not an easy road to thread we have trodden tonight but this road leads to blessedness this road leads to the cross of Jesus Christ because if we have grasped this there is no other place for us there is no place of easy there is no place of relief there is no bomb anywhere this problem this harrowing experience of realizing what is in our hearts it knows no cure except the bomb of the cross of Jesus Christ it is simply the way that we must thread and perhaps a way that we must thread again and again and again to bring us not just to a realization of our sin as an end in itself because that is useless but to bring us by way via ■■■ those and and effectively to be on our knees at the cross of Jesus Christ where sins are washed away where aching hearts are given relief where the burden is lifted where the burden is made to quite simply roll away the guilt of sin what is sin what are we talking about tonight is it just simply a psychological problem is it simply as the psychologists say guilt feelings are nothing more well that's useless because you see it has to be true guilt it has to be sin against God it has to be it has to end it has to reach the point where you say against thee thee only have I sinned and in thy sight done this evil that thou mightest be just and justified when thou speakest bringing us to the place where God is utterly just in condemning us forever where he is utterly just in saying to us away from me but to the point where he actually doesn't say that because Christ has died because the work has been done and finished we can come along this road that we've come tonight and we can come to its terminus and say Lord have mercy on me a sinner and we can be unable to look up to this great work and set our hope in it set our hope on what he did for us that is the point of the exercise otherwise it has no point

it sometimes people say to me you Christians you're always talking about how you are all miserable sinners it's all so depressing it's all so depressing now if that's what they think of our gospel there is something wrong we are miserable sinners sinners but we are saved sinners that's the thing the road to salvation must come through the way of conviction of sin it is sinners that he saves and he saves them gloriously completely and utterly and finally and irreversibly it is just utterly impossible that one that he shed his blood for will ever be lost it is utterly impossible it would be saying that God is not God to say that because he sent his son to the cross the cross with a guarantee guarantee that he would see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied that he would see the product of that great endurance on the cross of that great obedience unto death that he would see the product of it that he would be satisfied and that he would be satisfied that he would be pleased you

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see well not me can never be that he could be pleased with me and yet that is what the scripture tells us that he will see he will see the truth of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied so we put ourselves on this day through all this humiliation and through all this confession conviction and confession of sin we examine ourselves we afflict our souls to what end surely it is to the end that we might say i am done unless christ died for me lord lord make him mine help me to know help me to have it in myself to know that i am a child of god that is the point of it there is no point in traveling this road except to come into the glorious light of the gospel of jesus christ may god grant it to us over these days that he will open our vision and our understanding and our appreciation to praise him and to magnify him and to glorify him for this great gospel that he has committed into to Motivation to your hands let us pray thank you

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