The Sovereignty of Your Heart

How Well Do You Know Your Heart?

Years ago when Mary Jo and I started going out, I asked her if we were dating. She told me no, that to be dating there has to be romance in the relationship. Well, I thought that because I was the one paying when we went to a movie or out to eat together, that meant we were dating. Not according to Mary Jo. Because she did not have certain feelings of attraction toward me, she did not see us as dating. I discovered something important about the human heart. The heart is sovereign. One person cannot make another person feel in a certain way, can't force the other to fall in love or even want to be friends. Today we are going to consider a fascinating aspect to how God sees you. The big idea is perhaps surprising. You have sovereign control over your heart and God lets you decide how you will manage it.

The book of Revelation is a treasure chest of insight, not just into what is coming but also regarding the nature of God. Perhaps you have not given much thought to this statement Jesus made but it is worth pondering deeply. Speaking of Himself, Jesus declares, **What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.** (Revelation 3: 7 NIV) Jesus is Lord of all. The term we use for this is that He is Sovereign. There are some things He does and no one or nothing can stop Him. And there is that which He prevents from happening and there is not a force in the universe that can make it come to pass. Satan tried to stop Jesus from being King of Kings and he could not. Satan only ushered in the conquest of Jesus over death and sin by sending Him to the cross. Satan is not alone in arrogantly thinking he can stop Christ from doing what He chooses to do. The world is full of people who think like Satan.

One of the most oft quoted verses in the Bible is found in the book of Revelation. **Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.** (Revelation 3: 20 NIV) There is something stupendous about this statement that deserves careful consideration. Jesus says He stands at the door and knocks. He waits for you to open the door. He does not force His way into your heart. He won't violate your sovereign right to decide who you will let into your heart. Jesus will let you have your way there. If there is any truth to the lines of Invictus by William Henley, it is this. "I am the captain of my soul." Henley is the captain of his heart and so are you. The Lord knocks, you decide if you will let Him in and have His way with you as friend and Lord.

When God invited Moses to have a lifetime of friendship with Him, Moses easily could have turned down God and walked away. The burning bush was of course stupendous, but It was not enough to sway Moses to accept the call to lead Israel out of Egypt. **Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.** (Exodus 3: 1-2 NIV) There Moses was, literally talking to the angel of God in a flame that did not consume the bush that contained it and when the Lord gave Moses his calling to lead Israel out of Egyptian captivity, Moses refused to accept it. **And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"** (Exodus 3: 9-11 NIV) Notice Moses' response. He was backing away from God's plan for him. In the end, Moses decided to take the Lord up on the mission to lead Israel but not because God beat the door down to his heart. Moses had control of his heart, and he decided to follow God.

We see the same sort of situation with Pharaoh but with an opposite outcome. The Lord showed Pharaoh through a variety of supernatural signs that he needed to set the Israelites free and allow them to leave Egypt. One sign after another God provided Pharaoh, from Aaron's staff being turned into a snake to the Lord flooding Egypt with frogs, Pharaoh would not accept the Lord's command to release the Israelites from captivity. When Pharaoh pleaded with Moses to call upon the Lord to send away the plague of the frogs and God did what he asked, Pharaoh responded in the same way as billions have across the course of time. He hardened his heart against the will of God. **But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said.** (Exodus 8: 15 NIV) You too can do that. You can close the door and not let God into your life. You can leave Jesus knocking and knocking if you wish. It isn't tough to do. You just say "no" to Him and walk away.

You can easily miss the crucial point the Apostle Paul makes about giving. **Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.** (2 Corinthians 9: 7 NIV) You decide in your heart what you will give and even if it isn't what God deems right or generous, He lets you make the call. Everything from deciding if you will read the Bible to choosing to forgive or not, is up to you because you are the sovereign ruler of your heart. Christ will stand and knock on the door to your heart, He may even yell and wave to try to get your attention, but you choose if you will open the door or not. Proverbs provides deep insight into this relationship between you and your heart and God's way with you. **In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.** (Proverbs 16: 9 NIV) Christ does not invade your heart and manipulate your thinking, but God certainly knows what you should do and all the ramifications of your decisions. Even though the Lord does not decide for you what you will do, He in His great love and mercy shows you the right way to go but not only that, He decides what the outcome will be of your decisions. It is up to you what you shall decide in your heart. I have a friend who once was a faithful Christian who is currently committing adultery. He has abandoned his wife and moved in with a girlfriend. God has not taken over his mind and forced him to give up this wickedness. He has decided and he believes he made a good decision to violate his wedding vows. He has made up His mind, but His steps are ordered by God and what happens next in his life is up to Christ.

There is a lovely reason why God lets you remain master of your own heart. He wants you to be His friend. Friendship is based on the sovereign will of two people choosing the relationship. You can never be a friend of someone forced into it. I recently read that the fascist dictator Josef Stalin was murdered by one of his closest associates. The man poisoned Stalin because despite the working relationship they had, he was never Stalin's friend; he served him out of fear for his life and the desire to have the power Stalin could give him. When the associate realized that Stalin was so psychologically unstable his life was at risk, he made the fateful decision to murder the dictator. How can Almighty God, the creator and sustainer of the universe be the friend of those He has created? It is only possible if He gives them sovereignty over their own heart. Listen to this statement of Jesus. **I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.** (John 15: 15 NIV) What an incredible declaration Christ makes here. He calls us friends. But it is not just anyone who is His friend. Notice what Jesus called a fellow that He had just met. A group of guys, wanting their crippled friend healed by Jesus, was undeterred when it was discovered Jesus was in a home with a crowd all around Him. They broke a hole in the roof and lowered the man down to Jesus on his mat. Seeing the great faith of all of them, Jesus made the crippled man a promise. **When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."** (Luke 5: 20 NIV) The critics of Jesus who were there mistakenly focused on Jesus' promise that the fellow's sins were forgiven. What they should have noticed was that Jesus, the Lord of all, called the man friend.

But not everyone is a friend of Jesus. There is a select group of people who are His friends. Keep in mind that the Bible says that God loves the world. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** (John 3: 16 NIV) There is not a single one of us that God doesn't love and want to be His friend. Peter reminds us that Christ does not want anyone to turn away from Him and reject His salvation. **The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.** (2 Peter 3: 9 NIV) But just because Christ wants to be one's friend, doesn't mean that person chooses to be His friend in return. It is the one who obeys on his or her own the commands of Jesus who chooses to be His friend. That is the clear indication that you are truly a friend of God because you have chosen to be one. **You are my friends if you do what I command.** (John 15: 14 NIV) We now return to our big idea. You have sovereign control over your heart and God lets you decide how you will manage it. If you want to be His friend, you can. It is up to you. As for me, I want nothing more in life than to be a friend of Jesus.