

The Transformation Series: Change God's Way

Selected Text, Preached at Harambee Church by Pastor Mike Gunn on October 28th, 2007

"The bible cannot be reduced to a set of directions for successful living. This does violence to the very nature of the word of God and robs it of its power. The bible is the world's most significant story, the story of God's cosmo-restoring work of redemption. The bible is a 'big picture' book. It introduces us to God, defines our identity, lays out meaning and purpose of life, and shows us where to find help for the one disease that infects us all-sin. If you try to reduce the Bible to a set of directions, not only will you miss its overall wisdom, you will not make sense of the directions. They only make sense in the context of the whole story."

"How People Change"
Paul Tripp/Tim Lane

Intro

In the first week we saw that there is hope for change since God promises that He is working on us until we are conformed to the image of His Son. We saw that our relationship with Christ not only equips us with everything we need, but the relationship itself begins to transform our hearts. Thirdly, we saw that God places us in the perfect context for change, His church. Now we are going to switch our focus from these foundational truths, and begin to examine the *process of change* that God is working in us. Today we are going to see how perspective helps us in our change process. We need to evaluate our lives and circumstances through a God shaped lens in order to fully understand what He is doing. What we sometimes miss in the midst of our life is that God is present daily in the details and circumstances, even when things are going horribly. As believers, we are all placed within God's story as it unfolds in our every day circumstances. We must see God as present and providentially involved in our lives. It is typical, but unbiblical to believe that God is too busy to deal with the details. He lives outside of time, and is able to hear our prayers, and care about every event and issue in the world. We need to see God's big picture, which is strewn throughout the bible in God's story. That "Big Picture" consists of **HEAT**, which represents your circumstances both good and bad; **THORNS**, which represents the way our hearts react to the circumstances in our life; **CROSS**, which brings perspective to everything that happens, and points us to who God is, and what His goals are, which is a renewed heart for His people; **FRUIT**, which helps us to respond differently to the same pressures and circumstances. ***Instead of trying to change our circumstances, God is trying to change our heart!***

5 Gospel perspectives

1. Our sin is worse than we can imagine, but God's grace is greater than our sin!
2. God is concerned about transformation at the heart level, not the behavior level.
3. We should benefit from our relationship with Christ here and now, and in eternity.
4. God calls us to grow and change.
5. Our Christian life is a lifestyle of Repentance and Faith

From the Head...

Our Summary Model (Jeremiah 17:5-10)

In these verses we see the 4 different aspects of Heat, Thorns, Cross, and Fruit. These four metaphors give us a template in which to see our lives, and the way that God changes His people.¹ These verses are a bit like Psalms 1 reminding us that what we trust has consequences in our lives. The passage contrasts between trusting in humanity for our "Strength" and trusting in God for our strength. Our response to heat (see verse 8) either brings forth sin (Thorns; verses 5-6) or moves us toward the Lord, and brings forth joy (Fruit; verses 7-8). The underlying context here is the issues of our heart (Verses 9-10). Even the conduct by which we are judged (Verse 10) is the conduct that is the result of our heart.

A Lesson from the Wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:1-14)

Here we have a story from the Old Testament that displays the four elements that are foundational to understanding the story the bible tells us in regards to God's direction, and His plan for change in our life.

Heat, We see in verses 11-14 that God uses the circumstances of the Israelites in the wilderness as an example of life under pressure. Paul is describing the wilderness experience as described in Numbers chapters 11-14. Some of them seem too close to home! Some of the "Low" lights include:

Thorns, We see in 1 Corinthians 10:5-10 the many ungodly ways Israel reacted to their circumstances. In verses 6-7 Paul focuses on the heart, which these behaviors come out of.

Numbers 11:1 – The Israelites complaining to God about their plight.

Numbers 11:4-6 – The Israelites complaining about the food God had provided for them.

Numbers 11:10-15 – Moses complains about the people God had given him to lead

¹ These 4 things are seen throughout the story of redemption we find in the bible.

Numbers 12:1 – The leaders are divided, and complain to God

Numbers 13:26-29 – The people complain about how hard it will be to take the land God had promised them.

Numbers 14:1-4 – The community complains about their situation, and demands new leaders, blaming Moses for their problems.

Cross, In verses 1-4, we see that Paul focuses on God's presence and provision during the wilderness experience. It is imperative that we rely and trust in Christ during the heat in our lives.

Fruit, In verse 11-14 we see that the fruit comes as we acknowledge Christ, stand firm in our faith, and trust that any temptation we face, we can overcome, because of the promises of God and the power of His Spirit in our lives.

A Personal Story (2 Corinthians 12:3-12)

Here we see the four elements in the life of Paul. He is facing an incredible amount of heat (vv. 4-7; 8-10), the temptation to the thorns of self-reliance and "worldly wisdom" (vv. 9, 12), the reality of God's compassion (v. 1) and power to deliver them from their circumstances (vv. 9, 10).

...to the Heart

As believers, it is important to see that God is present in the circumstances of our life, and that we need to see the "Big Picture," which helps us understand that God is using our circumstances to help us change and be transformed into the image of His Son. It is in the every day events in our life that God wants us to exercise our choice to bring our desires under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We can best do that by looking at the cross of Jesus, and learning who Christ is, and what has He done for us. Subsequently we can respond to the same heat in different ways, especially as we repent of our desire to control our lives, and gain our happiness through means other than Christ.

Books for further study: Most of this material is taken from "How People Change" and "Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands" by Paul Tripp and Tim Lane, as well as their accompanying workbooks

Next Weeks Verses: Psalm 88; James 1:1-18

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