

The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)

Many summers ago, Carole's mom took the train up from Baltimore to spend a week with us. She went back on a warm afternoon in August. I took her to the train station in Wilmington. I had been mowing the lawn and decided that I did not have time to change clothes. My mother-in-law was an understanding thing, and the usual clientele at the train station wouldn't care what I looked like.

Only later would circumstances drive home to me how bizarre my lawn-mowing attire was. My shirt with a collar had wide vertical stripes with geometric shapes between the stripes, and its colors were predominately green and beige. It was not tucked in but worn over blue, Bermuda shorts. White, cotton, athletic socks were standard Saturday fare, and my tennis shoes were orange. I looked liked a clown.

Undaunted, I accompanied Carole's mom into the train station and up the stairs to the platform. The train for Baltimore arrived. I lifted her suitcase on to the train and hoisted it into an overhead bin. I hugged her, thanked her for her visit and turned to leave, when my whole body tensed, and fear came over me. The train was moving.

I ran to the conductor and said, "I'm not supposed to be on this train. I was just helping my mother-in-law get her suitcases on board." He was composed and implacable, and he said, "Well, sir, the next stop is Baltimore." My mother-in-law suffered me to sit beside her, and we both endured the amusement of fellow passengers, who were obviously enjoying every moment of this little drama.

After taking care of his usual responsibilities, the conductor came back to me, took my personal information, my mother-in-law there to vouch for every detail, and issued a handwritten pass, which he assured me the conductor on my train back to Wilmington would honor, and there would be no charge.

Carole's dad met us at the train station, we explained what happened, they called Carole to tell her what happened and approximately what time I would be home. The train tracks at Mount Royal Station in Baltimore are underground. I went downstairs to wait, eager to be as inconspicuous as possible. To my extreme discomfort a wedding party in full regalia came down to the platform. The couple had been married in Baltimore and the whole wedding party was going to New York for the reception. They would be on the same train I was on. I moved as far from them as possible. I stood behind large posts, a most uncomfortable clown in orange shoes.

The train arrived. I got on and sat down. The train left Baltimore. The conductor came to me, and I gave him the handwritten pass from the previous conductor. He read it, looked at me, read it again, and said, "I have to finish taking tickets. Don't move." I felt like a criminal. I did not move. He came back, confirmed the validity of the pass, and once again with skepticism written all over him he said, "Be sure you get off in Wilmington." And this time the other passengers eyed me with great suspicion. I just looked like another vagrant with possibly greater powers of persuasion.

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Jesse's Surprise

Let's look more closely at this powerful idea in 1 Samuel 16. Things were not going well in the political house of Israel. Saul, Israel's first king, Israel's eagerly

awaited first king had turned out to be a disappointment. The kingmaker in those days, the prophet Samuel, was the most disappointed of all. Divine guidance made Samuel confident that he would find Saul's replacement in Bethlehem. He went there to offer sacrifices to the Lord, which anyone could see, but he also went there to identify the next king, which no one could see.

A man named Jesse and his sons lived there, and Samuel invited them to a sacrificial feast. As soon as Samuel saw Jesse's firstborn son, he thought, **"Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord."**

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" ... Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The Lord has not chosen these." (1 Samuel 16:6-7, 10)

Then, the story takes a turn that I hope you find as interesting as I do. Samuel looked at all seven of those sons Jesse paraded before him and said in effect, "Is that it?" The Bible says nothing about Jesse's emotions, but I don't think he was happy with the way the interview was going, and I wonder if you can feel reluctance in his soul, when he said to Samuel, **"There is still the youngest ... but he is tending the sheep."**

The prophet was unimpressed with Jesse's feelings and made it clear that no one was going to enjoy the sacrificial meal until that youngest son was present. I don't know if ancient Israelites rolled their eyes, when they had to do something unpleasant and unavoidable; but that proud father of eight sons told someone to get his youngest son and be quick about it. His name was David, and his name will never perish from the earth.

Then, the story takes that interesting turn I mentioned. David **was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one."** (1 Samuel 16:12) Now, really that is remarkable. The Lord had already told Samuel not to consider height or appearance. You kind of expect the chosen one to be homely, maybe looking like something the cat dragged in, not a hunk with **fine appearance and handsome features.**

But the statement that governs how we should understand this event made it clear that the Lord didn't choose David because of the way he looked. He chose him because of what He saw in David's heart. **Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.** That does not mean that outward appearances don't matter. It means that something else matters more. Your heart matters more. What I looked like on that long ago train ride to Baltimore mattered. What kind of man I was on the inside that day mattered even more, and it mattered more to the One who matters more.

At the risk of ruining a perfectly good sermon with a definition, I need to give you a working definition of what the Bible means, when it talks about the heart; and it talks about the heart all the time. In the Bible your heart means what you love and what kind of person you are becoming because of what you love.

The pastoral staff wants to reflect with you this winter on the Christian doctrine of the heart. In other words we want to reflect on what we love and what kind of people we are becoming because of what we love. In particular, we want to reflect on the power of Christ to redirect and restore your power to love that is simply the greatest power in a human soul. That reflection starts with a description of what God sees when He looks at the heart and what He proposes to do about it.

Inviting Jesus into Your Heart

I want to start with a habit of speech that you may hear any day of the week in thousands of churches. It is the invitation to accept Jesus into your heart as your Savior. The New Testament never uses language like that, when it talks about “your heart.” I don’t hear it much around BVBC. I prefer the common New Testament language of *believe* and occasionally *receive* and once *open the door*. I don’t object to asking someone to accept Jesus Christ into his heart, but I think we ought to be aware of what we are inviting Jesus into.

Let me give you three examples from the Bible that fill that invitation with momentous significance. I will just read the examples and let you begin to feel the significance. **“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man person according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.”** (Jeremiah 17:9-10)

“These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” (Isaiah 29:13) After quoting that passage from Isaiah, Jesus went on to draw this conclusion: **“What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.”** (Mark 7:20-22)

In the Bible your heart means what you love and what kind of person you are becoming because of what you love. Something has so corrupted our power to love that we can love what is not best for us, and we can put on a religious show, when there is no love in us for the Lord we profess. And out of that disordered love come behaviors that wreak havoc everyday in people’s lives and in the lives of nations.

You want people to invite Jesus into that mess? Well, yes. What we just heard from three Hebrew prophets, the greatest of whom is Jesus, is the gospel, the good news. It is good news, because it tells the truth about us. It is good news, because Jesus Christ did not stand aloof from this mess. He walked into it with His eyes wide open and with a promise to set us free from it; and as the Gospel of John puts it: **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.** (John 1:5)

What shall I say about all this? To what can I compare it? What parable shall I use to chisel into your soul what it means to invite Jesus into your heart? It is like the television show on the Home and Garden Television channel called “Flip or Flop.” Flipping houses is a career for some brave people with deeper than usual pockets. Here’s one way it works.

A property comes up for auction. Sometimes it is for sale “as is”. It may be in a good neighborhood, and recent home sales in that neighborhood have sold for high prices. A drive-by finds that from the outside the house looks pretty good. Buyers go to auction hoping to get the house at a price that will enable them, after renovations and closing costs, to sell the house for a profit of \$30,000 to \$100,000. What no buyer at the auction knows is what a house “as is” will look like inside.

The moment of truth is when the buyer opens the front door of his new purchase. It is hard to believe how different the house on the inside can be from what it looks like on the outside. Previous owners have punched holes in the walls and ceilings, poured cement into toilet bowls, and stolen all the copper wiring they could get from the house.

People have added rooms to the house that have never been expected, and that do that never met code. Renovation becomes very expensive, very risky, very fast.

The Lord is the Buyer, and humanity with our disordered loves is the house **he bought with his own blood.** (Acts 20:28) What He finds behind the front door is a mixed bag, to say the least. What's behind the door is His specialty. That what it means that **the Lord looks at the heart.** Here's the exciting thing: News of the renovation the Lord has set in motion has reached almost every nation on earth. Serious work has been accomplished in many part of the human house. There is so much more to do.

Take Aways

The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. Appearances do matter. I have watched people in great suffering and even at death's door apologize for not being more presentable or for being too weak to talk long. We care about how we come across to other people. We are suspicious, when people say they don't care what others people say about them.

If you want to know Christ, if you want Christ to be formed in our soul, if you want to imitate your Father in heaven, then I urge you to take the following to heart. Care about what you love and what kind of person you are becoming because of what you love. Care about that, because God cares about that.

Second, over the next ten weeks or so we will consider some of the tools the Lord uses to renovate and restore the power of love in the human family. We will try our best to show you what some of those tools are and how they can work effectively in your life. I hope you won't miss a Sunday.

Finally, The Lord intends to renovate the whole house. What happens to you matters of course. But each of us needs to keep in mind that what we are experiencing is happening in other people as well. Our Lord is renovating the whole house. We can help each other.