

The Blessed Man's Healthy Heart

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Bible Text: Psalm 112:7
Preached on: Sunday, January 2, 2022

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We read the word of God this morning from Psalm 112. Psalm 112,

1 Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. 2 His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed. 3 Wealth and riches shall be in his house: and his righteousness endureth for ever. 4 Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. 5 A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion. 6 Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. 7 He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD. 8 His heart is established, he shall not be afraid, until he see his desire upon his enemies. 9 He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour. 10 The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish.

The text which I call your attention this morning on this occasion of the installation of our office-bearers is Psalm 112:7,

7 He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD.

Beloved, in the Lord Jesus Christ any godly man who is elected to the offices of Christ's church, any man with even a rudimentary spiritual understanding of these offices, whether minister, elder or deacon, takes up the calling with trepidation. The calling God entrusts to us is awesome and weighty. In the words of Hebrews 13:17, we labor in those offices as those who must give account, and the account that we must give is not to man but to God. We have been given a calling that far surpasses any human ability and will quickly drain and expose the sin of the man who rests in his own strength.

The text before us, then, though applicable to every member in Christ's church, must carry a special significance for you who serve this congregation together with me. In addition, it's evident that we are in a spiritual battle, the intensity of which increases in

these latter days, and again that's true for all of us, the entire congregation, but the intensity of that battle is felt and faced especially by the office-bearers whom God has called to stand on the front lines of that battle, and certainly in these past years we've seen evidence of that. We have had those who have fallen to teaching false doctrine thankfully restored. We have had careless remarks made from pulpits where greatest care must be taken to unfold the truth of God diligently and faithfully. We have seen once respected ministers suspended or deposed, having succumbed to the attacks of the evil one and having brought their offices to disrepute for their refusal to submit to those elders who sought not only their welfare but the welfare of the congregations they served, and subsequently for the schism by which they abused and continue to abuse Christ's bride. We have had office-bearers who have profaned the office by sexual sin. We have been attacked from without by those who have begun to invent a new theology and the attempt to portray us as being unfaithful. In some cases, we have had ministers and elders face unsubstantiated accusations, accusations that questioned their motive as the enemy attempts to sow suspicion toward a faithful ministry and faithful churches. We have also had to confess poor decisions made by consistories and major assemblies, which has caused the distrust, even contempt, toward God's office-bearers. Still more, we have seen the reason why Paul saw it necessary under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to give instruction to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:20-21, "keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called," and that latter reference is to those arguments by those who claim to have an exclusive knowledge, science, gnosis, "Which some professing have erred concerning the faith." And that isn't even to mention the personal attacks that Satan and his minions wage against our sinful flesh; nothing delights him more than to see an office-bearer fall and by that fall to bring unrest to the souls of God's people. Yes, we stand on the front lines of the battlefield, called by God to execute righteous judgment and to be faithful in wielding the sword of the Spirit.

How, then, do you dare take up these labors, and how shall we continue in the calling that God has given us? If that isn't enough to give you pause, there's also the fact that we enter these labors desiring the spiritual welfare of the entire congregation, longing that our labors find joy and not grief. And God gives us joy, we may see the congregation as a whole flourish, we rejoice in the church's children growing in the faith, we find delight in those who are nurtured in the riches of the gospel and who confess their faith before the congregation, we praise God for his tender mercies in bestowing his grace in time of need and giving contentment to those bearing affliction, and in general showing himself faithful to his people. But it isn't all joy in the offices. We also see rebellion against the word of God. We labor with those who reject sound instruction, who will not exercise, for example, faithful stewardship, or who continue to walk impenitent in their sin. We face the blame-shifting, sometimes having impenitent sinners blame us in the attempt to excuse their own sinful walk. You elders will likely have to deal with those who refuse to respond to your phone calls or texts, who attempt to evade you, who ultimately reject the gospel that you desire them to embrace.

There's grief also in the labors of the offices which is why we plead for the congregation to pray for us. But again, how are we to carry out these labors? The text that we consider

today is essential instruction for us. It calls our attention to the need for a healthy heart. We cannot exercise the calling of our offices faithfully without a healthy heart, so I call attention to Psalm 112:7 under the theme "The Blessed Man's Healthy Heart." We notice, first of all, a heart established; secondly, a heart with a steady beat; and finally, a heart withstanding troubling events.

The text speaks of a heart that is fixed, established. It's interesting that in the next verse there's a different Hebrew term used that is translated in our English version as "established," and there the term is a passive term that we might translate as "being supported or sustained." But here in verse 7, the term "fixed" speaks of a heart that is firmly established and therefore stable. It's a heart that provides steadfastness in the face of trouble and trial.

Now you recognize that the term "heart" here is used figuratively; the text doesn't refer to the physical heart. It would be possible to read the text "his mind is fixed," because certainly the text speaks of an activity of the mind; trusting, after all, is an activity of the mind. But that isn't the text. The term "heart" is used so we have to search out the reason for the use of that term. As the physical heart can be spoken of as the source and fountain of our life because from it blood circulates through every part of the body, carrying with it life or disease, so when the Bible speaks about our spiritual heart, it's referring to the center and fountain of our life spiritually.

As office-bearers, we need to remember not only for our own spiritual welfare but also for the spiritual welfare of those for whom we care and those whom we serve, God has created us spiritual beings. In every aspect of our lives, we stand in a definite relationship to God. A person always acts spiritually either opposing God or living in humble submission to him. A person either rejects the gospel of God or receives it by faith. He chooses the evil or the good. He seeks his own earthly desires, or he subjects himself to the will of God. When you deacons are assisting a person with financial need, there's always a spiritual aspect, a spiritual component that has to be taken into account. Is there faithful stewardship being exercised? It's certainly possible, even when one exercises faithful stewardship, a person or a family goes through a time of need that surpasses their ability to provide for that need, but there may be times when there is simply unfaithfulness in the use of the gifts that God provides us. In either case, there has to be appropriate instruction from the word of God.

As office-bearers in caring for the sick, we cannot provide for the medical needs of God's people but we realize that, and must realize, that in the times of affliction there is always a spiritual response to that affliction that must be addressed from the word of God. There might be a humble submission and contentment in which we may rejoice and then we bring appropriate scriptures to encourage, but sometimes in affliction we also need to be called to patient submission to the will of God, that we be not consumed by bitterness and discontent in God's ways with us.

In every circumstance of life, we take a spiritual perspective rightly or wrongly because God created us creatures who live before his face and who respond to him as spiritual

creatures. The heart, therefore, is the source or fountain from which we respond to God. Our heart, again speaking figuratively, pumps the lifeblood of our lives from a spiritual point of view. Our heart is deeper, therefore, than all our thoughts and desires and motives, all our conscious life. The heart determines the nature and spiritual direction of our plans and thoughts. The heart determines all the acts of the will and therefore all our actions. As our heart is, so is our life. If the heart be sick or dead, we are sick or dead. If our heart is pumping the pure blood which sustains our life from a spiritual point of view, then we live. You understand then as office-bearers how critical is our heart health, again, spiritually.

For the heart to be fixed or established, we have to be speaking of a heart that is alive; clearly the text speaks to you who have been given life in Christ, the only spiritual life there is. You realize, of course, that Adam's fall corrupted man's heart entirely. The heart, man's heart was filled with incurable disease. It continues to beat but it's the heartbeat of spiritual death. Instead of being the source of good, that heart became the source of sin and darkness, impurity and filth; that spiritual heart muscle is hardened and its chambers permeated by a vile disease that turned us totally against God and his Christ.

So when the text speaks to those who fear the Lord and when it speaks of your heart being established, it is speaking to you in whom God has already worked a radical change of heart grounded in the work of Christ, indeed, uniting us to him, the Holy Spirit worked that change of heart in regeneration. The wonder work of regeneration. God has fulfilled that glorious promise of Ezekiel 36:26-27, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." What an amazing and wonderful gift of God that is. We have received, if you will, a heart transplant. We have received that from God himself. He's not only the giver of that gift but to use another figure of speech, he's the surgeon who implanted in us that new life, but we cannot be oblivious to the fact that that new heart, that pure heart implanted by the Holy Spirit in regeneration, is a heart that must beat for a while in the midst of the impurity of our old man, these old natures, and in the midst of a corrupt world in which we live, and because the Lord doesn't drag us to heaven, he calls us to diligence in maintaining a healthy heart.

Now our text doesn't set forth that call, it simply assumes a healthy heart. I'm simply calling attention to the fact that our heart is affected by all sorts of impurity. There are powerful enemies constantly attacking that heart, even as there are viruses and bacterial infections that attack our physical heart. So for example, if impure lust, or pride, or malice, or bitterness, penetrate the chambers of our heart, then everything that pumps through those chambers will be largely tainted by those impurities. How is that heart established in health? Scripture exhorts us in Proverbs 4:23, "Keep thy heart with all diligence," and that's essentially the same meaning as the Apostle Paul in writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." This is tremendously important for all of us, but the importance is magnified for us who stand on

the front lines of the battle because to keep your heart with all diligence is to show your dependence upon Christ, and he's the only one in whom we can stand in this evil day.

To establish your heart health is to rest upon him who is our only strength in the battle and upon his word. When it comes to the spiritual heart, scripture speaks of that heart being nurtured in one way. The Psalmist speaks of it in Psalm 119:11, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." Heart health depends upon the word. Psalm 119:80, "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed." That's reflected in the very Psalm we are considering this morning, Psalm 112, in the first verse when it says, "Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments."

There have been many office-bearers who have fallen in recent years, not just ministers, elders and deacons too. Whether those falls came by reason of lust, or pride, or bitterness and anger, or a lack of wisdom and self-control, I can tell you that in every case there is evidence of a man who is not living close to God. Sometimes it's difficult for those whom we serve to understand that a man can spend hours studying the word of God with those hours only serving to fuel his pride in thinking that he understands more than his fellows, and certainly more than that aged grandmother or uneducated farmer that sits under him on Sunday; and a man can spend hours in the word of God going through an intellectual exercise while blind to the application of that word to his own life. You realize, too, that a minister is compelled to study the word in order to do his work from week to week. That doesn't necessarily mean he studies the word spiritually in dependence upon the Holy Spirit to guide him and to give him wisdom. He must but not all do, and probably all of us sinfully lapse from time to time in our necessary spiritual approach to the word of God. But it's possible that an elder or deacon neglects the word altogether, except perhaps in going through the motions of reading the Bible for his family at the dinner table. May it never be so with any of you. But I tell you, if we neglect the word, if we fail to approach that word with spiritual mind, pleading that God gives us wisdom and the ability to understand that word with the spiritual mind, yes, of that godly grandmother and that uneducated laborer, God will expose it and he will humble us for our unfaithfulness no matter how highly respected we once were in the eyes of men.

"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee," is crucial to a healthy heart established in the face of this great spiritual warfare. Again, that's because a healthy heart is established upon the rock who is Christ. It is by such nurture that the heart is healthy, fixed or established. It's established in knowledge, true spiritual knowledge with which we humble ourselves before God. It's the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and his place of preeminence in doctrine and life. It's knowledge, therefore, that lays hold of him in whom alone is all wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 1 Corinthians 1:30. This is the reassuring knowledge that provides the steadfastness necessary in the face of all difficulties and trials, indeed in the face of the attacks of the evil one. The healthy heart, therefore, is also established with a sound eternal perspective. It isn't just ensnared in the trials of the moment; we're able to live in the confidence that nothing shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, but that we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

So also the heart is established in the duty to which God calls us. I won't repeat what was set forth in the form of ordination this morning. I have been blessed to serve in this congregation with faithful office-bearers, office-bearers who take their duties seriously, and those duties can be summed up by the term "leadership." We're called to lead God's people, to lead them in the paths of righteousness. That isn't just to say, "This is the way you must go." It's to say, "This is the way, follow me." We are not lords, we are servants called to be examples to the flock. So Paul instructed Titus in Titus 2:7-8, "In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you."

For my second main point this morning, I would have you notice that the blessed man's healthy heart is a heart with a steady beat, and that steady beat is found in this: his is a heart trusting in the Lord. Who is more steady than Jehovah our God? "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he," Deuteronomy 32:4. His very name, Yahweh, Jehovah, defines steady, and Jehovah is the one in whom we put our trust according to Psalm 112:7. He is the "I Am," unchangeable in his faithfulness. He upholds his covenant without fail. He guides his people by his counsel also saying to them, "My counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure."

The Christian is not prepared for trial by trusting in his own strength. An office-bearer is not going to withstand difficulties by trusting in self and in his own intelligence and ability. We all know by experience what happens when we fail to rely upon our heavenly Father thinking that we can well do it on our own. It never turns out well, does it? And when we are laboring in such significant and weighty labors as we face in the offices of Christ's church, we had better realize we are entirely dependent upon God and the work of his Holy Spirit. And the Lord frequently reminds us of that, too. We labor in the midst of the congregation longing for the salvation and spiritual welfare of those with whom we labor, but when we see one reject the word of God that we bring, persist in impenitence, we realize that as much as we desire the salvation of that member, only the Spirit of Christ can soften the hard heart and work salvation. Salvation is all of God, nothing of us.

So trusting in God, we are trusting in his power and his wisdom. No one has ever resisted the Lord successfully. Think of Pharaoh, that great enemy of God's church. What was Pharaoh before the mighty hand of God? God himself tells us, we read it in Romans 9:17, "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh," and by the way, I would have you notice something here, who is speaking? God. So when we read, "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh," we need to understand that's the same as to say, "God says." You stand before the word of God, it's not the Bible says, that means God said. "Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth." Not only is God powerful in protecting his church also from the malice of evildoers who rise from within, he's powerful to break the proud heart, soften the hard will, he's powerful to save even the most difficult people with whom you might labor. After all, he was powerful to save us, wasn't he?

But we also trust the wisdom of our God. That trust doesn't come naturally. We want to understand God's ways. When we're going through difficult circumstances we want to know what God is doing, and not just generally as in he's leading us to heaven, we want to know why he's doing what he's doing, and what he's accomplishing right now in this. We have to realize God's ways are higher than our ways and his thoughts than our thoughts, and God isn't required to answer to you and to me. But he says to us, "Roll your burden onto me. Trust in me." And as our hearts beat with that steady beat by the faith that is our sin Christ Jesus, we trust in our heavenly Father. We know that he doesn't fail to realize his own wise purpose, and the beautiful thing about this trust is the way God works by his Spirit through the word. As we trust in the Lord, he strengthens our heart. So we read in Psalm 27:14, "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD." And Psalm 31:24, "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD."

The heart with a steady beat is that which characterizes the man who has a healthy heart, but then the text points out that this man with the healthy heart "shall not be afraid of evil tidings." God has given him a heart that withstands troubling events. Evil tidings there will be, tidings that shake us. They can come in a multitude of different ways, and living in the perilous times that we do, we see and hear many of the things that Paul warned against, warned Timothy concerning in 2 Timothy 3, there are departures from the faith. Those who grow up in the church receive faithful instruction in the home and school, faithful Catechism instruction from the church, who reject all that they've been taught. There are troubling events that arise in family life into which a pastor or elders might be called. There are those who fall into sin who would despair of any possibility of God forgiving them who must be led to the cross and to the one who alone is powerful to save. There might be troubling events in the churches such as we have faced in this past year, and I fully expect, having been called to attend Classis East next week, that after Classis meets there's going to be another announcement, a troubling announcement of the deposition of another unfaithful minister.

These things trouble the churches, and therefore they trouble us who serve in the offices that sometimes are abused by those who are unfaithful. Those evil tidings might come by way of a phone call notifying you of a sudden death or a serious wreck in which one bears life-altering injury. Or those evil tidings might come by way of the gradual breakdown of this earthly tabernacle, our bodies, such as described in Ecclesiastes 12, a way which leads into chronic pain, even debilitating disease. Yes, evil tidings there will be. What a blessing God gives us when he gives us spiritual heart health. Those blows that sometimes take our breath away don't stop our heart; because we belong to Jesus, our heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.

Listen to Proverbs 2:10-15, "When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things; Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked; Whose ways are crooked, and they

froward in their paths." Well, that's true also in the face of personal trials and affliction. The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:7-8, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair."

How shall you and I stand in the battle? With a healthy heart resting upon our Savior, relying on his word of truth. Amen.

Heavenly Father, we thank thee for thy word, for the work of thy Holy Spirit giving us healthy hearts. Give us faithfulness to thee that we nurture those hearts by thy word, and that we trust in thee and are strengthened. For Jesus' sake. Amen.