

The Transformation Series: The Good News of Life's Trials

Selected Text, Preached at Harambee Church by Pastor Mike Gunn on November 4th, 2007

*"We are all born into a world we were not really made to inhabit. We were created **for** God, made to flourish in the comfort of the presence of our Father within the warm context of His undeniable '**hesed**' (love)."*

A Sacred Sorrow
Michael Card

"...by making life easier for ourselves in minimizing the nature and seriousness of our sin, we become greater victims of it. We are in fact not healing ourselves. Those who say that they already feel bad enough without being told about the corruptions of indwelling sin misread the path to peace. When our people have not been taught well about the real nature of sin and how it works and how to put it to death, most of the miseries people report are not owing to the disease, but it's symptoms."

John Piper

"The Christian life is not about finding shelter from the real world as much as it is about God meeting us in the midst of it."

Lane/Tripp¹

Intro

We are continuing our topical series called the "Transformation Series," which hopefully will help us understand the process by which the gospel transforms people from the inside out. The first week we saw how the promise and hope that God is changing us by His grace. In the second week, we saw that change doesn't come by mastering a task list, but involves an intimate relationship with Christ. In the third week, we took a look at the fact that lasting transformation happens within a community of believers (the Church), and last week we showed the model that God uses to bring about change in our hearts.

Heat is the details and circumstances (good and bad) in our lives that God is intimately involved in.

Thorns represent the fact that my problems stem from my sinful reactions to my circumstances based on the condition of my heart.

The Cross is where God meets me and changes me in the midst of my circumstances.

Fruit is the result of what God is producing in us through our circumstances, and our acknowledgement of our sin (Repentance), and my appropriation of His forgiveness (Faith).

Today we are going to begin to take a look at Heat; and the fact that God understands the intimate details of our joys and sorrows, and is using them as a change agent in our lives. We should gain comfort and hope knowing that God is working through our ups and downs.

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...

Have you ever felt alone during a struggle because you thought no one would understand? Are you hiding struggles and pain because you're afraid of what someone may think? In the bible we see many circumstances of the results of sin in people's lives, including the lives of those that are considered "godly." The fact is, Heat is a human reality and many times we will believe the lie that God isn't present. But according to His word, He is, and He cares.

The Reality of Heat in Psalms (Psalm 88)

It is amazing that this hymn is to be sung during worship, written by (as far as we know) a Levite priest named Heman assigned by David to serve the Lord with song. Here's a guy that is writing what are called Songs of Lament as worship songs (see **Psalms 42-49; 84-85; 87-88**). That is a far cry from the "Health-Wealth" gospel that is often preached in one way or another in the west.

Our transformation begins here, in the heat of our own lives. It forces us to think about the reasons for heat, which begins in the bible in Genesis 3. In the beginning, two things were taken for granted, God was clearly and obviously present with His people, and His love (hesed) was obvious. What we see in Genesis is that our awareness of this presence is lost, which threw the human race into great sorrow and sadness. It is also interesting to note that Heman was considered a "wise" man (see **1 Kings 4:31**). Wise men like Solomon seem to suffer from melancholy the most (see Ecclesiastes),

¹ Workbook, 5.9

since they seem to feel the sorrow that most of us don't care to think about. In the bible we see men like Job, David and Jesus weeping when the sorrow of this life confronts them. Two questions gnaw at us when we are lamenting, "**God, where are you?**" and, "**God if you love me so much, why are you doing this?**" These are questions of presence and love. They dominate the human heart and are the result of man's biggest issue: the fall of humanity, and the subsequent sinful condition of the heart.

The gospel is a call back to who we belong to through His design; it is God wooing His people back to Him. Psalm 88 is a real picture of real people struggling through the depression of life and trying to figure out where God is in this picture. Whether or not we are priests in the worship ministry or driving a truck for Pepsi, we experience the pains of living out of the presence of God sooner or later in our lives.

Approximately one third to one half of all of the Psalms are lament Psalms, and except for the Psalm we are looking at, all the others ultimately turn to praise. Many Christians don't want to lament because they believe it is unspiritual to do so, but what the Lament Psalms give us the freedom to do is express the depth of our hurt and the reality of our sin. To this, writer and singer Michael Card writes, "*Through lament, we regain both a sense of awareness and a language to express the hopelessness of our sin. We discover a way to enter the presence and there experience the despair that comes from unconfessed sin.*" What can be learned from this Psalm? Paul Tripp and Tim Lane suggest at least 5 things²:

1. God understands the full range of human joys and sorrows.
2. The presence and promise of the redeemer address real people like us.
3. The bible is clearly honest about the human experience and predicament.
4. Psalm 88 reminds us to turn to God in faith during our times of despair.
5. The bible describes a real world, and accurately describes a world that adheres to our experiences.

Psalm 88 is honest and authentic faith in the face of every kind of trial and success. When we are honest with God and our reactions to Him, then we can find out that He knows and He cares. This is the same Psalmist who writes, "*As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for you, o' God*" (**Psalm 42:1**). This is a heart after God, but caught up in the reality of life that has an already/not yet reality to it. We want Eden, but we live in Canaan!

The Two Sidedness of Heat in James (James 1:1-18)

The background of James is important. James is the younger brother of Jesus, who at one time was a non-believer (see John 7), but became a believer after the resurrection. He was writing as the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, which was going through much heat (both in persecution and in poverty). James is written from a pastor to his congregation in order to help them turn their eyes to Christ and not away, which is the normal reaction of anyone going through life's ups and downs. James addresses both those who are under trial, and those who are tempted to fall away because of their blessings. Because, as Tripp and Lane write, "*in reality, difficulty is often hidden in blessing, and blessing is found in difficulty.*"³

James is a passionate appeal for his people to turn to the "goodness" of God in the midst of trials. He, however does not shy away from the reality of trials (**v.2**), but helps them see that these trials can be used to mature/grow us as God sees fit (**vv. 5-8**). We live in an age when our whole methodology of healing is to remove ourselves from the trial by any means, when in reality the trial itself may be the agent God is allowing to make long lasting spiritual transformation. James also reminds his people that trials can and often do come in the form of blessings (**vv. 9-12**), which is why his emphasis changes from trials to temptations (**v. 13**), showing us that it is ultimately the way our heart responds to things like money, which makes the response to the thing sinful or not (**vv. 14-15**). It is our external situations that reveal a heart that can produce thorns (sin) or fruit (growth of Love), depending on the reaction. James exhorts his people to turn to God's goodness in these times (**vv. 16-17**). He finishes by reminding us that it is ultimately by His will that we would be the "*First fruits among His creatures*" (**v. 18**). This is God's doing! This is God's offering to Himself. It's a great reminder that God continues to work until His image is complete in us (See **Philippians 1:6**).

...to the Heart

It is important to our spiritual growth that we realize the reality we live in. Sin corrupts and destroys, and it mostly takes us by surprise. In our Moralism, we assume that sin is outside us, and that we have the strength to "move mountains," until the reality of life gives us the opportunity to sin in ways previously unimaginable. Until we begin to see how these life experiences are battle grounds for thorns or fruit, we will continue to use God as either our whipping boy, or our talisman.

What are you facing right now? Are you turning toward God in these moments, or are these circumstances taking you away from God? How has technology helped you believe that it is your security and not God? Do you realize that God knows exactly what you are going through? How does that matter?

² Tripp/Lane Workbook, 5.4

³ IBID, 5.8

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: Romans 8:20-22; Numbers 11:4-23; Numbers 14:1-4

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