



**Sunday May 17, 2015**

**Series: "Intentions"**

**Title: the sinful heart**

**Jacob Bender**

**courage Church**

There are a few verses that just have a way of cutting you right to the core of who you are. Like, you think you are a Christian, and then you read this verse and suddenly you aren't even sure anymore... it just crushes you. Well, we

are building a series on one of those verses. One verse in Proverbs that is not often quoted. In fact maybe you have never even see it in there before. But this verse cuts me to my core. I've only even heard it mentioned in one sermon ever... And we are going to do a series on it so you will be hearing it a lot. It's Proverbs chapter 20 verse 6, and it says:

**Proverbs 20:6 "Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man, who can find?"**

Everybody.

Everybody thinks they are good. They think they are godly. They think they are changing the world.

Everybody.

Everybody loves the approval of others. Most people love the attention. The glory. The fame.

Everybody wants to leave a legacy.

But at the end of the day, when you are tired, and done for the day, and you just worked twelve hours tearing a roof off a house in the hundred degree heat, and you are driving down the road, and somebody you don't know needs your help on the side of the road... And all you want to do is get home... And if you don't stop nobody will know. And if you do stop you will still probably never see that person ever again anyway.

And there is absolutely nothing in it for you...

Who stops?

Who?

It's easier to help people when the cameras are rolling. It's easier to serve when you will get recognized for it. It's in our nature to want that.

Jesus says in Matthew 6:1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. "

The Pharisees... They sound the trumpet. They do kind acts to be seen. They scratch your back so that you can scratch theirs... And Jesus says they have their reward. Because everything is done to be visible, that's all they will ever bare from it.

but Jesus tells us: "when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. " (v4,5)

And that is the heart behind this entire series. I read a quote from Brennan Manning once that just rocked me... He said "the temptation of the age is to look good, without being good."

So over the next five weeks, in this intentions series we are going to work on the heart. We are going to explore the things we don't even necessarily know are in there, we are going to explore the things we are hiding in there. We are going to look at the things we want other people to think are in there... There are just many layers of the heart.

But today we are going to first look at what we KNOW is in there.

Because before we can deal with the things we don't know are there, We need to work on what we know is.

today, I want to focus more on your motives. I want to ask you this morning, **where is your heart?** What place is it in this moment... because you can spend your whole life working to save the whole world, and still die miserable and all alone because you never knew any true community. You never got through that first surface layer of friendship *with anyone*. Because you never figured out what was in your own heart much less work any of it out in community.

And motives are a hard thing! The heart is a hard thing...

the bible says that the heart is deceitful above all else... And yet Paul says in Romans 2:16 "God judges the secrets of men."

Maybe you have heard this quote, "you are only as sick as your secrets." You are only as sick as the things that nobody knows about... As the things going on inside that you are stuffing and letting grow.

Well, Do you have secrets here today?

Is there a mysterious part of you, that you hope nobody ever sees?

That's what we are going to work on, today.

If you have your bibles, let's open to Psalm 103... We are starting today by taking a look at verses 8-12:

Psalm 103:8-12

"The Lord is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

9 He will not always chide,  
nor will he keep his anger forever.

10 He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our **iniquities**.

11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

12 as far as the east is from the west,  
so far does he remove our **transgressions** from us. "

The title of today's message is "the sinful heart."

This (Psalm 103:8-12) is good news, is it not?

The Lord is merciful. He is slow to anger. He abounds in steadfast love. He does not stay angry at us!

Two weeks ago we talked about reconciliation... What a great word to describe the ministry of Jesus... That guy was all about reconciling. He was all about restoring people. He was all about not holding their trespasses against them. It's what we are called to do in 2 Corinthians 5, and it's what the Psalmist says that God does here in Psalm 103.

He does not deal with us according to our sins. Or repay us for our iniquities.

He removes our transgressions as far as the east is from the west...

But what does these words even mean?

what is the difference between iniquity and transgression? And why does he do something different with them?

He doesn't repay us for our iniquities.  
But he removes our transgressions.

What is the difference?

When I was younger we had these friends who were living together in this house... A couple, and they weren't married. And because we were young and we were stupid and we knew that the couple was wrong but didn't know how to approach it or handle it gracefully we belittled it down to a joke amongst ourselves. We said, "that house is a den of iniquity."

The phrase is used in an 1940s song... Highly inappropriate especially for the era.. Some people use that phrase when talking about Las Vegas..

But We had no idea what we were talking about.

The difference can be easily summarized this way.

Iniquity is an inward motivation, while transgression is an outward action.

So the proper disrespectful joke would have been "their house is a den of transgression"... People use the term "den of iniquity" to mean it is a place that iniquity is carried out... But if it is carried out, that is transgression.

Your mind is a den of iniquity.  
Your heart is a den of iniquity.

It's a place that garbage lives.... It's where sinful behavior... Begins.  
Here. In the mind.

I heard it out once this way, transgression points to our conduct while iniquity points to our condition before God. (R1)

In the Hebrew, the word for iniquity is the word AVON. There is a word picture for Avon.

Remember when I was here in March and i showed you how in ancient hebrew, the language that the Old Testament was written, the language was written in both words and pictures? Each letter has a picture...and each picture together tells a story... Well these are the pictures you get the for the word iniquity:

An eye.  
A hook.  
And a fish multiplying over and over.

So when a Hebrew would see this picture this is how they would read it:

"Whatever your eye hooks to, multiplies."

That's a dangerous thought, isn't it?

Whatever your eye hooks to, multiplies.

Before you ever acted on any of the things you've done in your life in the past that looking back on now you are probably ashamed of... Before

anything ever got to the point of outer action... It started here. With your eye hooking to something... And NOT LETTING IT GO.

let's take a look at Matthew 5:27-30. These are the red letters

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. "

When you look at the Greek... At the root of what Jesus says here he says this... "Anyone who looks at a woman in order to lust..."

You can't always help the thoughts that rush to your head but you do have complete control over what you do with those thoughts.

Martin Luther King once said "You cannot keep birds from flying over your head... but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair"

You can't always control what your eyes come in sight of, but you can control what it hooks to.

But the point of Today is not about adultery.  
It's not about sex.

What it is about is a moment in which Jesus ratified the constitution. He gave us new insight into the law or at least the way we apply it to our lives.

At one point Matthews gospel (5:17) records Jesus saying this, he says "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

when Jesus says "I have come" he is talking about his intent. He is talking about what he came here to do. And his *intent* is to fulfill the law, which

when we properly translate the Greek means "to sustain by properly interpreting."

(Lekayem is an antonym for levatel - cancel, nullify, and used in the sense, preserve, maintain)

You see in Jesus day, one of the primary jobs of a Rabbi was to interpret the scriptures.

If one Rabbi would interpret a passage and another would disagree with the interpretation, he would say to the other "you are canceling, or uprooting, the Torah."

You are misinterpreting this. You are canceling a part of this. Which is unacceptable. So naturally his was very carefully treaded ground...

But once in a while someone would come along with a new perspective on a scripture entirely. They would claim new revelation... That this is what God actually meant. And of course when that would happen, it would be questioned.. It would have to be confirmed by many witnesses. By others.

It had to resonate, or they would be accused of "canceling the Torah."

So out of nowhere comes Jesus with these extraordinary new teachings... And saying this like "you have heard it said \_\_\_\_\_.... But I say \_\_\_\_\_."

Anyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery.

What's Jesus saying? If it were a question it would be the same one I asked you a few minutes ago:

"Where is your heart?"

This Spring, in New York, there was one Saturday that I had to go on the subway with all three kids... By myself... we had to go to an Easter Egg hunt that the church was putting on... and on the way back I carried the double stroller down all the stairs because there is no elevator at the 23rd

street stop... and the emergency door was WIDE OPEN. It looked propped open. Typically what I would have to do is the door would be shut, so I would swipe my metro card, pay my fare, go through to the other side, open the emergency door and pull the stroller through.

There was no booth at this station, and nobody was there... I pushed the stroller through, and was about to tackle that last flight of steps with the stroller when I decided to park the stroller, go back through that door, and slide my metro card through the turnstile.

\$2.75 that I didn't need to spend in that moment. But what else was I going to do with that \$2.75? It didn't belong to me. It belonged to the MTA for giving me a ride home.

I wish I could say that I always used that much integrity when faced with situations like that... but there have been times just like that when I didn't go back... When that door was open and I walked right through. but that time I did.

At the NY dream center, we have five core values. We worked and worked on this... And one of the core values we landed on was "Integrity." The word integrity comes from the word integer, which means a whole number versus a fraction. It's the WHOLE picture.

We worded it like this: we live with integrity, nothing to hide.... Then we would say "we live privately like we do in public, and are quick to express our mistakes." Because behind closed doors you shouldn't be doing weird things that you wouldn't be doing in the open...

But the more we said it, and the more we processed it, the more it felt wrong. So we flipped it. And now it reads: we live publicly like we do in private.

Because who you are in private, when nobody is watching.. When you can get away with whatever... That's who you really are.

You can commit a crime, and not get caught.  
And it still be a crime.



and everybody knows that.

But Jesus goes even further than the integrity of our actions, to the integrity of our hearts.

you can imagine a crime... or fantasize about a crime... or be motivated to do something evil, that you never even carry out, and according to Jesus, you are just as guilty. Because your INTENT is jacked up.

and that is iniquity. Its an inward motivation.

"Whatever your eye hooks to, multiplies"

Because the only way to commit murder, is to first have hate in your heart toward someone. There has to be a root. The only way you ever commit adultery is if your eye hooks to something, and a seed is planted in your mind... and you feed on that until you can't take feeding on it mentally anymore and you have to start feeding it physically... You have to act on it physically... because your mental capacity is exhausted playing these things over and over again in your mind.

Its intent. its inward motivation. Its what you wish you could get away with. Its how you really feel.

and in Jesus' day the religious leaders would tell people this... They would say "you can look... They went further than Martin Luther King... They went so far as "And even after you see, you can think whatever thoughts you want... You can go as far in your mind as you need to go to fulfill whatever it is that you thirst for, as long as you don't act on those thoughts... You can commit iniquity as much as you want... But you better not transgress!"

Now a transgression is "an outward action." Its an action. It is the act of doing something sinful. something harmful. something wrong. And the religious leaders said, you can commit iniquity, but never, ever transgress. never, ever act on those motivations.. Don't let them turn to actions. What mattered was the law. the physical, actual law... keep that. you can have your private world in your mind. **Just make sure it stays in your mind.**

Just as long as you keep the law... As long as you commit those 613 commands to your heart and you live outwardly by them.

The law that Jesus didn't come to abolish, but to properly interpret.

And so here comes Jesus with a new interpretation.. With the proper interpretation. And we all love Jesus because he criticizes the Pharisees for the heavy burdens they put on people... And he says things like "my burden is light..." But then he comes in and he throws everyone for a curve ball when he says something like what we just read: you have heard it said, you must not commit adultery... BUT I SAY TO YOU IF YOU EVEN LOOK AT A WOMAN LUSTFULLY, you have already committed adultery in your heart.

He says... No longer can you commit iniquity... And in properly interpreting the law He presents to us something new...

the spirit of the law...

And the spirit of the law deals with the heart... The root of the issue...

You see you can follow the letter of the law, you can follow the rule... You can obey the actual words but completely miss the intent of why that law was created in the first place... and that in essence is the definition of a dead religion. One that does not open the door to Jesus but rather is based on mindlessly following 613 commands that you don't really understand.

But Jesus understood that transgression begins with the condition of your heart. Whether you let anybody else see in there or not... It begins in the part of your life that nobody sees. And when your eye hooks onto those thoughts... They multiply... Over and over and over.

So in essence, Jesus actually made it more difficult, before making it easier. Because we are all guilty of iniquity. We are all guilty of the sins of the conscience.

And in all honesty you can even go the other way. You could have the right intent, yet break the rule, and sometimes there is more value in that. Jesus broke the rules in Luke 13 (10-17) when he healed the woman who had a disabling spirit for 18 years.

The bible said that this woman was bent over and she couldn't straighten herself.... For 18 years!!!!

But he says to her "woman, you are free from your disabilities" And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight and immediately she began glorifying God. Praising his Holy name.

It didn't matter to her that it was the sabbath... It had been 18 years!  
It didn't matter to Jesus.

It didn't bother him in the least bit. Because the spirit of the law is more valuable than the letter of the law. Someone was healed.

But it mattered to the ruler of the synagogue. This is what he said... "There are six days in which work should be done. Come on one of those days and be healed! Not on the sabbath."

And Jesus responded and said "you hypocrite. Do you not untie your donkey and lead him for water on the sabbath? This woman has been bound for 18 years!" And The bible says that Jesus put his adversaries to shame in this moment (Luke 13:17).

He did what was the "wrong thing" in the eyes of the religious leaders but he did them for the right reason. All the while the Pharisees and religious leaders focused all their efforts on their appearances... On how they came across before men, and they Focused all their efforts on what they "didn't do" and because of it.. **They didn't do anything!**

Let me say that again.

**The Pharisees were so focused on what they "didn't do" that they didn't do anything!**

Their lives were indifferent at best.

But listen to what Jesus says to them in Matthew 23:25-26 - "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. "

Your inward motivations are rotten. Work on that first.

Whatever your eye hooks to multiplies... Hook it to good things. Hook it to noble things. Hook it onto Jesus. Onto loving Him. Hook it on to loving your family, onto serving the city, onto a life of worship. "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things!" (Phil 4:8)

Hook your eye to those things!

Clean the inside of the cup even if the outside is a little rough around the edges. It may be refreshing to the rest of us to see that we aren't the only ones with a little dirt we are still scrubbing off every once in a while.

But these closet sinner games need to be over.  
So do these wanna-be sinner games.

There's not much worse than a wanna be sinner. I think it was Chris Hodges who said "Christians can be some of the grumpiest people I know... Because they want to be sinning but can't "

You were bought with a price far higher than maybe you are giving yourself credit for... The secret lives need to be brought to light today and they need to be repented for. We have too much God has called us to in this city than to let stuff like that linger.

God did not call us all to Detroit to join this amazing church to be held back some some faulty motivations... My own included. Man, I find myself there all the time.

"I sure hope people like me" why? No. Like me. Don't like me. Whatever.. Love Jesus. Meet Jesus. You aren't here for me you are here for HIM. I've spent more time daydreaming about ways that this church is going to take off than I have on my knees for it. What's driving that? It's flesh. It's the need for approval. It's the fear of failure... It's flesh!

James says (1:14-15) "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. (Desire to succeed, desire for power, desire for lust, desire for what is not theirs)Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."

What's he describing? The steps to transgression.

Let me give you another example... Anger.

Again, Jesus words in Matthew 5:21-22 gives us the spirit of the law... far harder to live by.

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."

Again... You can't help the birds flying over your head... But you can stop them from making a nest in your hair.

And if somebody has wronged you... If you have something against someone else today... You have to forgive. You've probably heard it said "unforgiveness is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies..."

It doesn't make any sense... It's only killing You.  
But Anger is not a bad thing. There are lots of things that should make you angry.

It makes me angry that people can't afford to pay their water bills and are going to have to live without water in Detroit... In a major city in the United States of America!

It makes me angry when religious groups do heinous crimes against humanity and do it in the name of "God."

It makes me angry that there are people in our communities dying before they meet Jesus.

It makes me angry that the church has the global reputation that it does.

But where we direct it... That's the game changer. Let it be righteous. Let it drive you to change something.

Not hurt someone.

Once your enemy has a face... You have a very big problem. Because our battle is not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12) and that's what you've made it.

Ephesians 4:26-27 says "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil."

Another version says "Do not let the devil get that kind of a foothold on you."

Don't let the devil get into your heart because you can't let go of what someone did to you. Because you can't give it to God. Because you can't stop fantasizing about harm coming to someone, or about a relationship you want but you know you shouldn't have...

Because if he has hold of your heart he has hold of your life.

Hebrews 12:15 says:

"See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;"

A Root is something that is buried. We don't see it, or at least we do not see all of it, but we see its fruit. We see what is coming from it. We know what it is producing.

Eventually we will start seeing what it is doing to you.  
How it is changing you.

We eventually are going to see it. And it will bleed into every area of your life. It will contaminate every area of your life. It will destroy every area of your life.

Roots of anger. Roots of lust. Roots of bitterness.

You can't hide in your heart forever. But that's what makes the words of the writer of Hebrews so beautiful. Yes, roots of bitterness, they cause trouble. They defile you.

They turn your heart black.

But the darker your spirit becomes, the more desperate you are for Jesus. The more desperate you are for a cleanse.

Church, see to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God in this place.

See to you it that you do not fail to obtain the grace of God when your heart is broken. When your mind is clouded. When all you can bring yourself to do is wish harm on someone else.

When you can't stop the daydreams or release the anger.

When something is going on, on the inside of you that you can't fix on your own.

I'll end with this.

A few years ago, when we were still living in Los Angeles, I remember in the middle of the night one night in December, Dawn got a call from her older sister, who was here in Michigan... It was one of those calls you never want to get in the middle of the night. It was a call filled with uncertainty.

It was a call asking for prayer.

Because Dawn's sister was at the hospital, with her two year old daughter. You see, earlier that week she found these bruises on little Juliette's legs. They were pretty big but she hadn't thought much of it... The problem is that they didn't go away. And when they went to the doctor, she mentioned it, and they took a couple tests just to be sure everything was fine, and then they sent them home... But all of the sudden late that evening, the doctor called and said "you need to bring your daughter back, now!" Her white cell count is so low, that if she so much as cuts her leg, she could bleed out and die."

A little two year old.

When you get a bruise, it is because something internal... **Something underneath your skin, is damaged.** It's something on the inside. And sometimes your body will heal itself, and other times, like in little Juliette's case, the bruises represented something far far worse going on inside her little body, **and on their own, were not going to go away.**

Well look at what Isaiah 53:5 says.

**He was wounded for our transgressions...**

He was wounded for the acts that we carried out.. The crimes we actually committed. He was cut. He bled. He paid a physical price.

**but he was bruised for our iniquities.**

Jesus paid an internal price, on the cross, for your internal motivations. For your intentions. For the crimes that you didn't commit, but maybe you wanted to. Maybe you would have if you had a real opportunity... Maybe you imagined yourself doing it. Those are shameful things.

You see Hebrews 12:2 says "looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

And people miss this all the time but when the writer of Hebrews says he despised the shame, it means he took the shame, the weight of your



thoughts... The things that haunt us that we have done or have even thought about doing. Paul puts this way, he made him who knew no sin to "be sin" on our behalf.

Jesus despised the shame of the junk in your deceitful heart. So that you could be free. So that you could be clean. He despised the shame, but look at where he is now? At the right hand of God. Because He won.

Because he is bigger than your iniquity. He is bigger than your transgression.

And it's amazing Through Isaiah, that God told us what the story would be 700 years before it actually happened. How affirming is that? Isaiah wrote this 700 years before Any of it happened.

That is called prophecy.

That is called confirmation.

And if you aren't convicted by the words of a prophet who prophesied every detail of Jesus' death, 700 years in advance, then what will convict you?

So let me ask you again, one last time.... **Where is your heart?**

Because according to Isaiah, In Jesus, your heart is redeemed.

The same spirit of the law that Jesus added unto us Jesus bore upon himself. And there is great freedom in that this morning.

the bible says that if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us.

Isaiah says in another place (42:3) "a bruised reed he will not break,"

And as we prepare for a time of response now... And take a few minutes and worship to one more song... I want to open up this altar today as a place for repentance. A place to come before God and ask him to make your heart new... To wash your heart white as snow. We will have people up here who are able to pray with you, or if you want to stay in your seats and pray with each other.

This is important... Don't miss this...

1 John 1:9 says "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

John says, confess your sins to God, and he will forgive you. And that's crucially important... But the bible, in James Epistle it says something so incredibly eye opening...

James 5:16 says that we confess our sins to one another, for healing.

Because we are broken, and something about talking about with another human being sets in motion a process of restoration.

Jesus didn't just die on the cross... Despising the shame, just for forgive you of it... Just to give you a home in heaven someday. He also died to restore your life now... To destroy whatever stronghold that is causing chaos in your life now. Today.

We are broken people designed to heal.