**Sermon 9-23-18**

**Paul Purdue preaching**

**Thinking about Life Spiritually**

My friend, John, is a rocket scientist; no really, he has a PhD in Aeronautical Engineering and is a distinguished professor the University of Tennessee Space Institute In Tullahoma, TN.

John was working with NASA on a multi-year review of the space shuttle technical specifications after the Columbia disaster. John was looking at the aerodynamic heating produced on the surface of the space shuttle during re entry to earth's orbit. It can get pretty hot, over 2,000 degrees. John’s expertise is aerodynamic heating.

John’s wife, Brooke, was pregnant at the time when John drove to a four day NASA conference. These were heady and stressful days as John’s committee could shut down a  shuttle launch.

On the last day of the conference, Brooke called saying, "It's freezing in the house, and I need you to get it fixed." Brooke wears a hearing device, so the phone is always tough. John left a little early and made the 4-hour drive back home to meet with the HVAC guy. The technician looked at the system and motioned John over. “Your wife says you work for NASA, is that right?” John smiled, “Professor, could you come here for a second? You do some kind work cooling off the space shuttle?” “Well, professor, take a look at this filter,” he smiled holding the dirty concave furnace filter in his hand. It was choked with dog hair. “If you would change that filter, it would let air get back to the heating unit, and you would not need  to call me just to put a new one for you.” The tech handed John an after-hours call bill for $300.

I just love that story, even if it does not fit perfectly into my sermon, but would you indulge me a second time?  Imagine your day. Think of all the stuff that floats through your head on any given day. Think about the social media you absorb, the music you hear, the news you consume, the people you see, your schedule, your relationships, your deadlines, and your decisions. Imagine even the choices made without much thought and the choices you feel locked into. Imagine that thinking passing through a big filter. What sticks to your soul, what hurts your heart, what delights your spirit? Imagine all that thinking passing through filter of prayer. Imagine that filter as a constancy of prayer, not a day of prayer in a far-away monastery, as a practicing of the presence of God in all of your thinking.    As the day moves along, you offer little whisper prayers: “Lord in your mercy,” “peace be with you”, “hallelujah,” or “thanks be to God.” Imagine a day of “praying without ceasing”- thinking theologically about the very details of your everyday life. (1 Thessalonians 5:17) Perhaps, Paul names this spiritual thinking as “having the mind of Christ”. (1 Corinthians 2:6-16)

“Pray about everything. (Think spiritually. Decide how to drive theologically. Let your consumption pass through a filter of prayer. Let your media move through the mind of Christ). Pray, asking and giving thanks in everything, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will keep watch inside your hearts and minds. Beloved by God, whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasant, commendable, excellence, and worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Philippians 4)

Iin Matthew 12, Jesus is sharp edged: “A tree is known by its fruit. How can you share goodness while you sit in evil? What fills the heart spills out of the mouth. Good people produce goodness from their soul’s good treasure. Indeed, people will have to answer on Judgment Day for every useless word they speak.” (Matthew 12)

The heart is a kind of spiritual filter. Jesus speaks of the heart about once a chapter in Matthew’s Gospel. The Bible talks about the the heart over 1300 times. The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible says, “unlike western cultures, which primarily associate the heart with feelings and emotions, the ancient near east culture emphasized its role in thinking, reasoning, and planning. The heart characterizes humans as rational beings. ...The heart expresses human striving.”

Change your hearts and lives! (Matthew 4:17)

Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives.! (MT 3:8)

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (MT 5:8)

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be. (MT 6:21)

What fills the heart comes out of the mouth. (MT 12:34)

Their (spiritual) senses are calloused. They are hard of hearing, shutting their eyes so that they won’t see and closing their ears so they won’t understand. They are open to changing their hearts and lives. If they would open their eyes, ears, and hearts, I would heal them. (MT 13:15)

“Don’t you understand?” Don’t you know that everything goes into the mouth enters the stomach and passes out into the sewer? However, what you say came up from your heart. A polluted heart contaminates a life with evil thinking, murderous breath, adulterous intent, perverse pursuits, dishonest ambitions, falsehoods, and insults. (MT 15:16-20)

Forgive your brother or sister from your heart.  (MT 18:35)

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart. (MT 22:37)

Jesus looked around at them with anger, grieving, because of their unyielding hearts. (Mark 3)

Scripture memorization is a great way to think spiritually. The earliest Christians likely committed most of Jesus’ teaching to memory. Scripture memorization is a great way to think spiritually. It was part of my adolescent discipleship practice. I had these pre-printed perforated scripture cards with a small clear plastic case. I was a runner and I ran most mornings with those cards in my sock or hand. At times, I stopped to check the wording under a streetlight. Some 30 years later those verses pop into my mind in King James glory. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path, and I will hide Thy word in my heart” One morning, I about ran off the road when I flipped the case to read 2 Corinthians 10:5, “Bring every thought into captivity for the sake of obedience to Christ” I was troubled to imagine bringing Jesus all of my adolescent thinking. I was weaned on guilt and thought of faith in a pretty rule bound way. Still, I imagine a lot of us struggle with the idea of bringing every thought we have to Jesus, so letting all our our thinking pass through a Christ-like filter, lens or window.

It is easy to get busy and not think spiritual. It is easy to segment our living, compartmentalizing our Christianity. How does a compartmentalized faith affect our souls? How does it feel to live with a divided heart? What would it mean to think about every action, pass every word through the mind of Christ?

I wonder, does our deepest humanity suffer when we offer friends and family loving-kindness and grace, but approach our neighbors with careful suspicion? Do we make some folks earn our good will? Do soften our hearts, unstop our ears, and open our to see God’s image in our sisters, brothers, neighbors, strangers, foreigners, and enemies? Do we pass our daily interactions through a spiritual filter: “Lord in your mercy”, “peace be with you”, “Father, forgive them”, “hallelujah”, or “thanks be to God.”

Does a justice meter deep in our souls dip near zero when we hold our friends to one standard and the opposition to another standard? What happens to our capacity to love when we only love those who love us?

Is our the image of God within us dulled when we dismiss people by category? Do not our hearts grow calloused when we judge by common interest more than character? Do we radiate Christ’s love, authenticity, and humility, thereby, creating a safe space for opponents to dare risk honesty with themselves, and maybe with us?

    What happens to our own internal integrity when do not study the scriptures to learn from God, but use the scriptures to prove our points? What happens when the Bible guides our theology, but not our ethics, our relationships, our words, our economics, and our politics? Are alot of us dying a slow spiritual death due to spiritually divided heart?

Oh, Lord, peel back calloused hearts. Heal our hard hearts. Open our eyes so we might see. Open our ears so we might understand. Change our hearts and lives, so that we might reside in healing. Amen.