

Deliverance from Rejection & Unloving

We are in week two of our Lenten sermon series called Divine Deliverance. Throughout this series we're going to be diving in-depth to the ministry of healing. As you know, in addition to teaching, and proclaiming the Good News, healing was one of the primary ministries of Jesus. Jesus came to deliver us from everything in our lives that keeps us from experiencing and enjoying the peace and joy He has for us. He came not just to bring physical healing, but emotional and spiritual healing as well.

Last week, Mark Rowland touched on the topic strongholds in our lives. A stronghold is a subject, attitude, or mindset that gets ingrained in us, that is out of step or contrary to the will of God. Strongholds keep us from experiencing the wholeness in our lives that God longs for us to have.

Today, we are looking at the strongholds of rejection and unloving. These two strongholds begin from lies that Satan tells us: we are not accepted by God; we are not loved by God. Certain situations and experiences in our lives can be doorways for Satan to use to get into our hearts and minds. For example, abandonment, adoption, sibling rivalry and divorce may be entry points through which the spirit of rejection may take hold. An unloving spirit may enter through similar ways, but also from abuse, neglect, lack of affection, and constant criticism.

How many people are there living quiet, lonely lives, infected by a fear of rejection?

In our scripture lesson this morning, Jesus is up north around the Sea of Galilee in the early part of his ministry. I'm reading from Luke 5:12-15...

¹²In one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the

ground and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

¹³ Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him.

¹⁴ Then Jesus ordered him, “Don’t tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.”

¹⁵ Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.

We wonder about this man because leprosy was the most dreaded of diseases in New Testament times. The condition rendered the body a mass of ulcers and decay. Fingers would curl and gnarl. Blotches of skin would discolor and stink. There were even certain types of leprosy that would numb the nerve endings, leading to losses of fingers and toes—even a whole hand or foot. Leprosy, as one man said, was death by inches.

The social consequences were severe. Since they were considered contagious, lepers were quarantined or banished, usually to a leper colony. Throughout Scripture, the leper is representative and symbolic of the ultimate outcast. He stands for any person who has ever been rejected, turned away, or unloved. He is avoided by people he doesn’t know, and condemned to a future he cannot bear.

In our own time, AIDS patients and HIV positive people have been treated in similar ways, especially in the early days of the AIDS epidemic. I remember hearing stories of patients being sent away, and being rejected by their family and friends. I still remember what an international story it was when Princess Diana touched an AIDS patient without wearing gloves in 1991. She

said, “It is hard to find words to express the aching loneliness and rejection I have found these patients experiencing as they approach the end of their lives.”

Imagine having no one to touch you—not a family member, a spouse, or a friend. Imagine no handshake, no warm embrace, no tap on the shoulder, no kiss on the lips. Deprived of all touch.

While we often think of leprosy as a skin disease, it is really a disease of the nervous system. Often it would begin with something small like a barely perceptible weakening of your grip. Perhaps one day you were working your field with a hoe and you noticed one of the tips of your finger was numb. Soon this was followed by numbness in your other fingers. By the end of the planting season you couldn’t feel anything at all. The hand grasping the handle might as well have belonged to someone else. The feeling was gone. And you would try to keep it hidden from your family out of fear.

Until one day you plunged your hand into a basin of water intending to wash, but see the water turn red. Your finger was bleeding from a cut you hadn’t even felt.

Now you have to go and see the priest. One look at your hand and he covered his mouth and extended his palm forward. “You are unclean,” he said. And with that pronouncement you lost your family, your farm, your friends, your future.

This total rejection seems harsh doesn’t it?

But there are lots of reasons people feel this way. Maybe you have felt rejected and unloved. Maybe you got that dreaded letter in the mail saying you didn’t get the job you really wanted. Maybe you didn’t get an invitation to the party everyone else was going to. Maybe you got cut from the team, even though you worked so hard.

An eight year old boy whose parents were recently divorced waited excitedly on the front step, little suitcase next to him, for his father to pick him up for a weekend overnight. His father never came for him.

From the moment we are born, we experience new and different things. These things shape and mold us as we discover who we are, and begin to develop our self-concept and worth. Not all of these experiences are good, and because of the broken nature of this world, some are very painful and damaging. Negative family relationships, abuse, loneliness, fear, the death of a loved one, all leave their mark on us because we are so vulnerable in childhood. We aren't yet equipped emotionally to deal with such trauma. It is devastating as an adult to feel unloved, but far more so to a child or an insecure teenager.

These emotional hurts are pushed down into our subconscious where we are not aware of them, but they continue to affect us. It's during times of stress, when we overreact to circumstances, that our problems surface. Boredom, exhaustion, tension, bitter memories, anger, resentment, and jealousy.

I know a man who suffered abuse as a child at the hands of and uncle. It scarred him, and made him feel worthless for a long time. Many years later, he came to faith in Jesus, and through lots of counseling, therapy, and coming to understand that God created him with infinite worth and loves him no matter what has happened to him, he found the new, abundant life God longs for him.

Jesus does the same for the leper. After five years of leprosy his hands would be gnarled. Tips of his fingers were missing as were portions of an ear and nose. At the sight of him mothers grabbed their children and covered their eyes. Others pointed and stared. The rags on his body couldn't hide his sores. He had to

shout, “Unclean, unclean!” whenever he was near other people. How tiring and exhausting life was.

That is until one day he heard that a traveling rabbi was coming to his village. Word on the street was this rabbi had performed some pretty incredible miracles in Capernaum. Some were calling him the Messiah. What did he have to lose?

The leper saw the huge crowd coming down the road. It would have been impossible to have gotten close the rabbi, but not for him. Just the sight of him sent people running in the opposite direction as a flood of fear swept across the crowd. But this time he ignored their screams. Every one ran away but Jesus. Rather than see fear on the face of Jesus, the leper saw only compassion.

He fell to the ground and begged, “Lord, you can heal me if you are willing.”

“I am willing”, Jesus said, “be clean”.

Now Luke records these words, “*Jesus reached out and touched the man.*” I think Luke mentions this for a purpose. Remember Luke was a physician. He notes this small but significant action of Jesus in the healing process.

Think about that for a minute. Think how long it had been since the leper had experienced the touch of another human being.

Think how many touches you get a day: a handshake, a hug, a pat on the back, holding someone’s hand. The leper had not been able to do that that for years.

Think how much affirmation that would have sent flowing through his spirit.

“He touched me.”

Warmth where there had been numbness. Strength where there had been atrophy. His back straightened and his head lifted. Life where there had been decay.

When I went to Haiti the first time, I spent a day at the Sisters of Charity home for the Destitute and Dying in Port-au-Prince. Here, men came suffering from tuberculosis, most of whom would die from what is a treatable disease in the United States. These men had been turned out by their families who couldn't risk the infection of this disease. TB atrophies the muscles, especially around the lungs and in one's back. We spent part of our time offering back rubs to people to help ease the pain of the disease, but more importantly to offer the healing that comes from a touch. The healing of our emotions that comes from knowing you are not alone, forgotten, rejected.

I believe Jesus can heal our damaged emotions. Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians that *"If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here."*

Jesus can heal our feelings of rejection. We can have our old, hurtful memories replaced by positive ones. Not that we forget them but we allow Jesus to transform them through a process of prayer, counseling and forgiveness.

By the time Jenn reached the age of puberty, her grandmother was instilling in her a hatred for her own body. "You're fat and you're ugly" were the daily arrows she fired into Jenn's soul, and Jenn believed it. This went on for years.

One year for her birthday, Jenn's grandmother gave her a big can of Slim Fast. It was expired, and her grandmother had torn off the UPC code to get a rebate. That was my value, a big, old can of expired Slim Fast.

Jenn's grandmother not only taught her to hate her own body, but she ingrained in her a tendency to be mean to herself, and to blame herself for anything that went wrong in life.

In college, Jenn became friends with a young woman who invited her to a Christian ministry group on campus. Jenn discovered a Jesus who loves her, and that what her grandmother was doing to her was abusive and wrong. She entered therapy and there she said she learned to channel her anger at what her grandmother did to her in new and more positive and productive ways. Her anger at her grandmother was as "big as a house" she told her counselor, and so she began to build that house out of out of art supplies: dowel rods, foam board, butcher paper. She lined the floor with Slim Fast labels, and wallpapered the walls with writings from her personal journal about her grandmother.

One day, when the "anger house" was finished, Jenn built a little altar in her backyard, and set that house on fire. As the house went up in flames and smoke, her anger toward her grandmother just kind of burned up and went up in smoke too.

She was finally able to forgive her grandmother through the help of therapy, and the forgiveness of Jesus.

Later, when Jenn's grandmother lay dying of cancer, Jenn was able to offer forgiveness to her, and together they found healing.

Forgiveness is God's way of healing the human spirit. Jesus taught us this truth when he said, "If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your father will not forgive your sins."

I believe that forgiveness is key to our health and wholeness. I have seen many people who suffer from guilt, resentment,

bitterness, anger which could be alleviated through a forgiving spirit.

Truth is, we all make mistakes, we fail, and we hurt each other. We live with people who require compassion, tolerance, understanding, and an endless supply of forgiveness. If we don't forgive each other on a regular basis, we begin to store up these old hurts of the past, the unresolved arguments, and old issues we just can't seem to talk about until we have a mountain of clutter in our relationships. Resentment builds until we begin to avoid family members, friends, fellow church members and stay on our side of the clutter that separates us until the relationship begins to wither.

Forgiveness is love in action. Forgiveness clears the slate, forgiveness cleans the air, forgiveness can bring resolution. Forgiveness allows the grace of God to heal memories. It can be painful. It can make us feel vulnerable. It means talking about feelings. Forgiveness is tough stuff.

Forgiveness doesn't mean:

- "It doesn't matter" or
- "I excuse you" or
- "Just forget it"

Forgiveness is confronting the issue—making no excuses, overlooking nothing, but sincerely repenting and confessing the wrong behavior before God and the offended person. And it means that we extend grace to the offending person and say those three words, "I forgive you."

People who are hurt, hurt other people! When somebody's hurting you it's because they're hurting. It's easier to love them when you look beyond the hurtful things they're doing to you, and

see where they are hurting. It enables you to be more sympathetic.

The fact is, those who deserve your love the least are those who need it the most. They need massive doses of love in order to heal their emotions and restore relationships.

So how do we find release from rejection? We begin by asking God what needs to be healed in us. The Holy Spirit knows, because the Holy Spirit know us better than we know ourselves.

Then share the painful memory with Christ in an attitude of prayer and tell him of your pain. Better yet, share it with someone that you trust, and have them pray for you.

Give your hurt, anger, pain and other negative feelings to Jesus to heal. You cannot be a passive bystander. You have to participate willingly in the healing process, especially if it requires forgiving someone.

Next, believe that the healing process has begun, and that you are beginning to grow and become closer to God. Then begin acting as though you are healed.

There is another story in Matthew 8 about not one, but ten lepers being healed. When they asked for help from Jesus, he told them to go and show themselves to the priests. This was part of the requirement of the Jewish law once you are healed. The priest would make the final determination that you were free from the disease. Even though they were not yet healed, they went in obedience and faith, and were healed... as they went. Even though they couldn't see their healing, they acted in faith as though they were.

One final point to remember: only one of the ten lepers returned to thank Jesus for his healing, and Jesus commends that one leper. So don't forget to thank God for his healing presence and to trust him for the results. Gratitude is such an important part in our healing.

Our prayer is that Anderson Hills will be a church where massive doses of healing love will be given and received. It begins with us hearing Jesus say to us today, "I am willing. Be clean." Today, as we sing our closing hymn, "He Touched Me," you are invited to come forward for anointing with oil and a prayer of healing. I ask those who will be helping to come take their places as I close the sermon in prayer...

Prayer

Father, we thank you for Your Son, Jesus, who died on the cross not only for my sins, but for my fears. We thank You that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, and that He wants us to be completely whole: spirit, soul and body.

Jesus, you knew all about me even before I was born. Thank You for being there as life began. Thank You, for being there when I was born, and loving me. For some came into this world not being loved and not being wanted, and they felt such rejection.

Lord, walk back through every second of my life during those early years, go back and fill every void, give the love that was not received. Remove every hurt. Take away all fears - fear of darkness, fear of falling, fear of animals, fear of being lost. I thank You, Jesus, for setting me free and healing me.

Heal the hurtful memories of school. When we were treated harshly by a teacher, or a classmate. Thank You for healing those hurts, and setting me free from those fears.

Bring forgiveness for any way I have hurt or failed my parents or they hurt or failed me.

I lift up my brothers and sisters to you. Where there were feelings of competition, jealousy or resentment, I ask that your healing power and love mend every broken relationship. I forgive each brother and sister for hurting or failing me, and I ask their forgiveness for hurting or failing them.

Jesus, please take away every hurt between my mate and me. I thank you for mending every broken relationship, and wiping away every painful memory.

Take away any feeling I have of failure or guilt as a parent.

Heal every feeling of rejection, abuse, abandonment and replace it with your presence. Remove the fear, anger, and bitterness. I thank you for taking away my sorrow, my grief, and my mourning. I thank you for giving me your joy and your peace.

I thank You, Jesus, for making me whole. Amen.