

A Bear Story: Good News in Bear Haven

***The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? Jeremiah 17: 9
I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 36:26***

A long time ago there was a place that came to be called Bear Haven Georgia, it was located at the top of a great big hill. It was, in the beginning a very beautiful town. It had a crystal clear lake with water so clean that you could practically drink the water. It had nice sturdy houses and a well kept park. To the uninformed it seemed the ideal place to live. However, the people that lived there were known far and wide for their bad behavior. One town leader after another attempted to teach the citizens how to behave well to no avail. The town grew worse and worse. Soon, because the people were so bad, the lake became polluted and the park rundown and dirty. Eventually the sturdy houses began to deteriorate and the streets became littered with garbage.

One day a man named F. John Bear, Jr. moved to town and immediately began to work to make the town better. He said, I am a big, strong, man and I can get things done around here. I am going to clean up this dirty place and make it clean again. So he worked tirelessly, toiling night and day to straighten out the mess the town had gotten itself into. Because the people were so bad he was faced with a great problem. He would fix the houses, clean the park, and purify the lake, but the people would continue to be bad. Soon things were even worse than when he started.

He decided to make new laws and to try really hard to enforce them. He said to himself, "I am a big, strong man and I can get things done around here. I am going to make these people obey my new laws and soon this place will be clean and stay that way. He made tougher and tougher laws, putting more and more people in jail. He made all the towns people be in the house at six and in bed by seven. He closed down all the bars and clubs. He outlawed smoking and drinking and put everyone in jail who failed to keep His law. Soon the people became afraid to behave the way they had in the past. The people began to act better, but they were very mad about not being able to be bad. Eventually the town was cleaned up and they even restored the sturdy houses, cleaned up the park, and made the lake beautiful again.

Everything seemed well, except the people were resentful and really wanted the laws removed. After awhile Mr. Bear began to relax the laws and let the people come out after six and decide when they should go to bed. A short time later people began to sneak and smoke and drink again. You began to see garbage in the street and soon you began to hear of people fighting. It was not long

before the town became dirty and lake polluted. Mr. Bear grew old and eventually died. Soon he was forgotten and the town went on as it always had.

Mr. Bear worked very hard to have a clean and orderly town. Many people do and it is a very good thing to desire clean and orderly towns and cities. He failed to achieve lasting results because he could not provide the most important thing needed. The people of Bear Haven needed clean hearts before they could have and maintain a clean town. Mr. Bear was a big, strong, man who could get things done. But he couldn't give the people what they needed most, new hearts. After all, there are some things people just cannot do!

In fact the greatest problem in the world is the problem of how can the human heart be changed into a good heart. Men have tried to pretend that the heart isn't as bad as it is, but it never works. In the last hundred years men have been saying this, but we have had two world wars and more fighting than ever before. This matches what the God of the Bible has been saying about our hearts for thousands of years. The Bible is God's book and it is very concerned with this problem of bad hearts. It talks a great deal about the heart of men.

The Deceitful Heart:

A very long time ago God sent a messenger named Jeremiah to a town like Bear Haven. He was amazed at the way their hearts were. God told him, ***"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"*** (Jer. 17:9) It is hard for us to face the problem, but not facing it will not cause it to disappear. Some try to avoid it by simply creating better towns and cities for people to live in. Mr. Bear teaches us that this does not work and that there can be no getting around this matter. Cities and towns are bad for the same reasons that Countries are bad, for the same reason why there are wars in the world. It is because the ***"heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure."*** Mr. Bear couldn't change any of the hearts in the town of Bear Haven and no man can. ***"Who can understand it?"*** Men have tried to fix are towns and cities and even tries to use television and radio programs to change the way people think. But the problem is not so much with their heads as with their hearts. Above all else, people need new hearts.

The Stone Heart:

God promises to give new hearts to anyone who comes to Him and admits their need of it. To anyone who comes to God and admits that their heart is a bad heart, which they are unable to understand He will give a new heart. He spoke through another of His messengers in Jeremiah's time and promised this. Because these people would not listen God said they had stony hearts. He said through the prophet Ezekial, ***"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."*** (Eze. 36:26) The stony heart was an unlistening heart and the fleshy heart was a heart that would listen to God. The person who comes to God and receives a new heart actually becomes, in some ways, a whole new person.

They no longer find it fun to do wrong things, in fact, they delight in doing good. They want to please God because they are so happy to have these new hearts. It makes them so happy to have a good heart that loves good and dislikes wrong.

These new hearts cost God much to provide. He has His laws as well and, like Mr. Bear, has to punish those who break them. Everyone who has a bad heart breaks His laws and should be punished. He loves us so much that He wanted to give us the new hearts but the law was broken and punishment had to be given. The punishment, which had to be given, fell upon His own Son, Jesus. Jesus suffered the punishment for all those who see their need of new hearts and come to Him. If you trust Him He will give you it.

The thing that needs to be said is that Bear Haven and every other city and town actually belongs to God, because He made the whole world. He isn't happy about these bad hearts and makes the new hearts available because He is going to have to get rid of all the bad hearts so that He can make the world better. If He has made new hearts available and people say to Him no thank you I don't want a good heart they are really saying they don't like Him and would rather be bad. When God gives the new heart He also makes the person His child. One day they will go to be with Him and will live in a good city forever.

If you know that you have need of a new heart and would like God to give you one, you must do three things:

1. Be completely honest with yourself and God, God hates dishonesty, and admit how bad your heart is the way it is. Admit that you don't understand it and that you cannot fix it.
2. Ask God to give you a new heart, because Jesus was punished for people just like you. Thank God for sending Jesus to be punished for bad people that they might receive new hearts.
3. Begin to read the Bible to find out how God would like you to use your new heart and how you can live in such a way that helps others see their need for new hearts.