

**“Broken” - John 21:15-17**  
**Pastor Burt Garwood – July 16, 2017**

There is a true story of an Olympic runner who fought the Japanese in World War 2. His name was Louis Zamperini. There is a movie about his life, entitled “Unbroken.” His airplane went down in the Pacific Ocean and he and two others from the plane survived in a life raft for 47 days before the Japanese captured them. He is put in a prison camp where the head of the prison camp decides that he wants to break him. But Louis never breaks.

- That’s one picture of a person’s will to survive and beat the odds...to never break, never give in, never give up sensitive information to the enemy. He would rather die than betray his fellow soldiers and his country. He is a true testimony of the power of a person’s will to survive...and never break.

The other side is a person’s willingness to surrender. To be broken for the right reasons. My daughter Eliana breaks when I just give her a look of disapproval. It crushes her heart.

Historically, God has broken people to get their attention. The most famous one is a curious string of events in Exodus chapters 8 to 11 about the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart.

- God sends the plagues to break Pharaoh, but Pharaoh hardens his heart.
- Look at this shift in chapter 9:12. The Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart. READ: Exodus 10:1-2
- In chapter 11, God does what we the reader might think is unthinkable. God kills the firstborn in every house in Egypt, including the firstborn son of Pharaoh. Pharaoh breaks, and sets the people of Israel free from slavery in Egypt.

What are the takeaways for us?

- While God has given us a free will to choose for ourselves how we want to live and whether to love and obey God, God’s will and God’s plan will still prevail.
- The Lord also hardened Pharaoh’s heart to introduce the Egyptians to himself, the all-powerful God, to show his strength over Pharaoh, who called himself a god.
- The battle between God and Pharaoh went far beyond just releasing slaves from slavery. It was a spiritual battle for the hearts and souls not only of the people of Israel, but the people of Egypt as well.

My dad grew up on a ranch in the sandhills of Nebraska in the 40’s and 50’s. He did most of his ranching with cutting horses that helped him herd cattle. Being around horses, he knew how to break a horse. To woo it and win its heart. But to do so, the horse had to surrender and trust my dad. Something had to give inside that horse to let my dad train him.

- In the late 90’s, my younger brother Phil had gone off the deep end with drugs and alcohol and wild living.
- I’ll never forget dad’s prayer...as a man who knew how to break a horse, he prayed this to God for his own son, “God break my son. Do whatever you have to do to bring him to you. Bring him within a breath of his life if you have to. Put him in a wheelchair if you have to. Whatever it takes to get him to break and turn to you, as long as you are able to save his soul from hell.”

While you have been given a free will, God will ultimately stand as judge over your heart, when all is said and done. But Jesus would rather woo you into heaven than scare the hell out of you.

- I think of Peter on the boat after Jesus blesses Peter with the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5. Peter falls to his knees before Jesus, suddenly keenly aware that he is face-to-face with a holy God. Broken, he cries, “Get away from me, for I am a sinful man!” But Jesus doesn’t back away. Instead, he calls Peter to follow him. Peter left his nets and his boat and his family and his career and followed Jesus.
- Another instance of grace is after Peter denied Jesus three times the night of Christ’s trial. It’s after Jesus has died and resurrected and was appearing to people with his scar-covered risen body in John 21.
- Jesus appears and gives Peter a second miraculous catch of fish, and leaves no doubt in Peter’s mind that same God-man he met years ago who blessed him with a huge catch, is standing here in the flesh alive today. Peter is broken again. As a result of his denial, Peter had discredited himself from being the Rock, the one whom Jesus would build his church on. Peter had gone back to fishing.
- Jesus appeals to his heart. Three times he says to Peter...“Peter do you love me?” And Peter responds three times, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” And I can imagine with each response, Peter getting more emotional. Jesus would answer, “Feed my sheep.” That’s grace.

When you step back to evaluate your life and all the things that are either going right or going wrong...or you wonder why you’re going through hard times...or that desert experience you’re in. Maybe it’s because the Lord is trying to get your attention. Or he wants to teach you something or strengthen your faith or bring your heart completely in line with his.

- So what’s it going to be? Are you going to be stubborn and harden your heart? Then watch out, because God has stepped in and hardened people’s hearts before, in order to break them. And there might be people who love you who are praying for God to break you.
- Why does he do it? Because the salvation of your soul is at stake. There is nothing more important to Jesus than that. It’s the whole reason he gave his life. To save your sinful and selfish and stubborn soul from eternal death in hell.
- So, he will use people and events that aren’t so pleasant, to break your heart to turn to him. He will put you through tough times and trials and desert experiences to break your heart to turn to him. If he has to. He loves you that much.
- But he would rather woo you. He would rather bless you with your own great catch of fish...if you would just trust him as your Savior and Lord and follow him.
- In the end, a broken heart is a heart that is surrendered to God. And a broken heart is one that God can rebuild for his eternal purposes.