**Achy Breaky Heart**

**First Baptist Church, Albemarle**

**October 1, 2017**

It is probably one of the worst songs ever to make it to the top of country music charts and even crossing over to the pop charts, peaking at number 4. Billy Ray Cyrus, father of Miley Cyrus, rode the song to fame and fortune in the early ‘90s. As if Billy Ray Cyrus’ version wasn’t bad enough, Alvin and the Chipmunks remade the single and made it to number 71 in the top 100 country songs in 1993. If you pay attention to the lyrics, it is a terrible song that refers to killing someone for taking his girl away. Yet, the chorus of the song will forever stick with you.

We don’t have to look very hard to find broken hearts in our world. Much of our world has experienced an achy breaky heart in recent days. People in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico and so many other places have experienced devastation due to the recent hurricanes. Our neighbors in Mexico are digging out of rubbles caused by a series of massive earthquakes. More than 1,200 people have been killed in parts of Africa, India and Bangladesh and some 41 million have been affected by recent flooding. People in the United States and all over the world have been experiencing an achy breaky heart.

Also, we personally can think of people today that are going through difficult times with broken hearts. Whether it is due to loss of loved ones or a difficult medical diagnosis, people are hurting. People we know are hurting because of divorce and estrangement from family members. Hearts are broken and the pain is sometimes unrelenting.

Over the last three weeks, we have been talking about how our faith and wellness is connected. We talked about how having a healthy soul is vital to our faith. We also focused on our physical health and how our bodies house the Holy Spirit in us. Last Sunday, we talked about healthy minds and how we should understand our vocation as who we are rather than what we do. Today, we finish up our series by looking at how a healthy heart impacts our relationships with God and the people around us.

In today’s text, Peter reminds us that life is short so we should not waste any time. Here we see what many in the early times believed: Jesus ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father but he will return soon to take his followers to a place he has already prepared for them. That was the eschatology of the early Christians. (belief concerning the end of the world as we know it)

We might expect a call for extraordinary behavior, thinking something unusual would be demanded in light of the nearness of the end. But Peter did not call for anything extraordinary. Peter encouraged his readers to pursue the virtues that Jesus taught in his ministry. We are reminded of what Martin Luther said when asked what he would do if the end would come today. He replied that he would plant a tree and pay his taxes. What Luther meant, of course, was that he lived every day in light of the end, and hence he would do the appointed task of that day.

Therefore, as followers of Jesus, Peter believed that we should live each day according to God’s will. What this means in practice is that we should be alert and sober for prayer, that we should live in sacrificial love that includes hospitality, and that we should use our gifts, whether speaking or serving, to help others. Our aim and motivation in all we do should be to see God glorified through Jesus Christ.

We know without a shadow of a doubt that there are health benefits of strong relationships. In an article published by Harvard Medical School, it stated that strong relationships have long-term health benefits as much as proper diet and exercise.[[1]](#footnote-1) Dozens of studies have shown that people who have satisfying relationships with family, friends, and their community are happier, have fewer health problems, and live longer.

Conversely, a relative lack of social ties is associated with depression and later-life cognitive decline, as well as with increased mortality. One study, which examined data from more than 309,000 people, found that lack of strong relationships increased the risk of premature death from all causes by 50% — an effect on mortality risk roughly comparable to smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, and greater than obesity and physical inactivity.

Healthy relationships result in a healthy heart practically and metaphorically. I believe that is what Peter was referring to in our passage. He was teaching us how to have a healthy heart.

First, Peter said to have a healthy heart, we should pray. In Peter’s time, the belief that Christ would return soon led some believers to lose their heads and act irrationally. So Peter reminded them to be clear-minded and self-controlled so that they can be in right relationship with God.

In his book titled *Prayer*, Richard Foster writes, “Today the heart of God is an open wound of love. He aches over our distance and preoccupation. He mourns that we do not draw near to him. He grieves that we have forgotten him. He weeps over our obsession with muchness and manyness. He longs for our presence.” Foster goes on to say that God invites us home: “home to serenity and peace and joy, home to friendship and fellowship and openness, home to intimacy and acceptance and affirmation.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

If the benefits of prayer are so great, why is it so hard to develop the discipline of prayer? Peter says we are not clear-minded nor self-controlled. I think Peter is right. Our minds are cluttered with things to do and with people to see. Our minds are not clear because it is preoccupied with our own selfish desires and our worries. We are filled with hurry and anxiety. We can’t seem to prioritize our lives in a way that places God in the proper order. Peter reminds us that we need to be clear-minded and self-controlled so that we can have a clear line of communication with the one who loves us unconditionally. When we are in a right relationship with God that is based on prayer, we experience a healthy heart.

Second, in order to have a healthy heart, we should love deeply. We live in a world that is incredibly divisive. Whether it’s in our politics, our sports or even in churches, divisiveness seems to reign. We can’t listen to the radio, read the paper or watch the news without learning about the dissention in our society today. We have forgotten how to love deeply.

Peter says that love covers a multitude of sins. He doesn’t mean that love covers up the things we do not want to face. Rather, the gift of love we are invited to offer one another day in and day out actually transforms situations, so that the ‘multitude of sins’ which were there before are taken out of the equation. Instead of squabbling and fighting, we can live together and work together. We can thrive together. We can love one another deeply. It is the way of Jesus and through him, we can carry out his command to love one another.

Finally, in order to have a healthy heart, we should serve others. Peter said to use whatever gifts we have to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. The gift Peter is referring to is our spiritual gifts we receive from the Lord. What gifts have you received? How are you using those gifts? In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul reminds us that the spiritual gifts are to be used to build up the Body of Christ in order for the body to build up God’s kingdom. When we all pitch in and carry the load together, miracles happen and lives are changed.

When we are focused on serving others, we take our eyes off of our own selfish desires. We place them on the needs of others. That helps us to develop a healthy heart because it prioritizes the world the way God designed for us.

The beginning of chapter four commands us to put on the mental armor that will make us strong to face the suffering, which we may have to face. This is not the only time the Bible reminds us that suffering produces character. It can often make us re-evaluate our lives.

We often hear of a person who survives a significant heart attack and makes a remarkable recovery; in such cases people often say that they have rethought their whole lives, and now realize much more clearly what matters and what doesn’t. However, we don’t have to suffer an achy breaky heart to know what really matters in life. What matters in life are God and people. No more and no less. So pray faithfully, love deeply and serve gladly. These things will produce a truly healthy heart.

1. “The Health Benefits of Strong Relationships,” Harvard Health Publishing, December, 2010, accessed September 26, 2017, [https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter\_article/the-health-benefits-of-strong-relationships](https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/the-health-benefits-of-strong-relationships" \t "newTurabian). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2002), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)