

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Rumspringa Pt. 1

Settling the Unsettled Soul

Selected Scriptures

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 10.08-09.11

Good morning Crossroads. Let's tell them again how good they did. Thank you so much. Great job. Well, good to have you here this morning. We're going to change things up a little bit this morning. We've been in a series, actually for a number of months working through the book of 1 Corinthians. We spent all summer working through chapter 12, chapter 13, chapter 14. Some difficult passages; controversial passages and felt like we needed just a little bit of a break from 1 Corinthians for a little bit. We're going to get back to it. We're actually going to jump over chapter 15 and pick up on the last chapter, chapter 16 in a few weeks. We're going to come back and we'll catch chapter 15 right before Easter because that chapter has to do with the resurrection so it would be a great study just to prepare our hearts; prepare our minds; to celebrate Easter so that's just a little bit of a forecast of what's coming here in the future. But right now I just want to spend the next few weeks just exploring a few topics that have been resonating in my own life and in my own soul and one of the things I want to help you understand this morning is just some basics about the Christian life. I think just from talking with a number of you, many times we get this idea that the Christian life starts with the new birth. It starts with embracing Jesus Christ by faith. And that's like point A on our journey. And then we think that point B is when we reach fulfillment; when we've passed from this life into the next and we see Christ face to face and that the journey from point A to point B is like just a straight line from here to there without much problems; without any issues; with a growing righteousness and Christ-likeness in our life and we think that and then we experience something else. We experience a life that is really kind of rocky. It's kind of moving forward and then taking a few steps back. It's our heart being totally embracing of God and then our heart sends wonder away and if we were to graft it it doesn't look that straight line between A and B. It looks kind of up and down, up and down. The reality is – that's the Christian journey. The Christian journey isn't a point A and a point B and everything is perfect in-between. The Christian journey really is our heart embracing Christ at times and then at other times we sense that we wander away. And then we come back to Him.

I was talking to our House Church Pastors about this on one of our Friday morning times of training and one of them who lives out in Amish country said it sounds kind of like a rumspringa. I had never heard that word before. Rumspringa. What's a rumspringa? And he started to tell me a little bit about this Amish philosophy. When their adolescents reach somewhere between sixteen and eighteen they send them out into the world to experience the world. The word rumspringa actually comes from a Pennsylvania German background that literally means jumping around or you could translate that sowing your wild oats. They send their adolescents out to kind of sow their wild oats in the world. If they choose that the world's lifestyle is the lifestyle that they want to adopt then they have to give up their Amish community. In a sense they're excommunicated. They're not allowed to come back. If on the other hand, after being out in the world and tasting that and they think that's not really what I want then they can come back. They're baptized into the Amish Community. That then becomes their lifestyle. And as we were talking that sounds an awful like this mini segments of what we experience in the Christian life – where we embrace Jesus, we embrace following Him but sometimes our heart, like the hymn writers says is prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love. And we gravitate away as if we're testing the world without God.

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I want to talk to you about that concept of the human heart and it's wandering, unsettled spirit. You know, the scriptures talk an awful lot about the human heart. In fact, the writers of Proverbs says in Proverbs, chapter 4, verse 23 – above all else, above all other things in your life guard your heart for from it are the wellsprings of life. From it is the wellspring. That's a directional point towards God. From our inner self. Where do we find our stability and our foundation? Not in ourselves. Not in our world. Not in our environment but in God. And so the Proverb says guard that inner heart.

Now, interestingly, the idea of a heart is a lot like our idea of a heart to the middle-eastern mindset. The scriptures we're written of course in the middle-east so they kind of have that eastern flavor to it and sometimes you have to dissect the meaning of a word to fully understand it. The heart is not that muscle that's pumping in your chest. It's like what we mean when we talk about a heart. You know, when you say the heart was broken or I just have a heavy heart. We don't literally mean that's what's going on with the muscle of our heart. We know that means the other person. Well, same thing with the writers of scripture. When they use the concept of heart, more times than not it's this idea of an inner person – the will, the soul, the emotions of the person. And what does Proverbs tell us? We ought to guard that. Guard it from what? Guard it from damage. Guard it from wandering away from our wellspring, our source in God.

About a month or so ago I was in at my doctor's office and just having kind of a routine check-up and he said you know what? You're in your late forties, you live a stressful life, you don't eat well, you have heart disease in your family. We really ought to run a battery of tests. Now, I had put him off in the past and he said it's really getting time. And so finally I relented and I did the whole thing. I did the blood workup. I did the stress test where they put you on that evil treadmill and the incline is pointed to the ceiling and you have to run your heart out. Literally you have to get our heart up to a hundred, forty-two beats per minute. You're doing this while some tech guy is standing beside you trying to have a conversation with you and all the while two things are going through your mind. Number one – you're trying not to fall off the contraption. And number 2 – you're trying not to throw up in front of him. And so you're just trying to get through that two minutes and they're off having a conversation. Well, in the midst of the conversation the guy says you know what? It probably won't be long until you won't need to do this anymore. And I'm thinking now you tell me. I would have waited. He says there's this thing called coherent imaging. It's a 4-D picture of the human heart and it's the actually activity of the heart can be monitoring.

Doctor's are using this now in a confined sense to be able to look in the different chambers of the heart to see if there's any blockage or calcification or anything like that. I was listening to him describe this and I did a little bit of research. I'm fascinated with the idea that you could actually see the human heart working and examine it from that way but more so than that my mind started to drift and think well, wouldn't that be interesting if you could do that with like what the biblical writers call the heart, the inner person. Imagine having some ability to look inside your life and just to check to see what is the condition of your heart. What would it look like? Would it look like an obedient heart or maybe a disobedient heart? Would it be a soft heart or a hard heart? Would it reveal that maybe the heart is on a rumspringa from our

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well source? What would it tell us? And then what signs would it give us that maybe our heart is preparing to wander away or maybe it's in the midst of wandering away? I don't think it would be the same physical signs that a doctor would see in the human heart. I think these signs would come from without and around the heart.

Signs like maybe a chaotic life. I'm not talking about a busy life because we all lead busy lives. I'm talking about a chaotic life – a life out of control. I don't know about you but when my life is chaotic, I mean when it's just out of control first thing that goes is my heart. It starts to wander from God. It's as if I don't have room in my life any longer for God and my life starts to wander away. No wonder the writers of Proverbs say above all else, above all other things guard your heart. Watch it. Literally that idea of above all else means more than all other things this is what you ought to watch. More than watching your money. You know we have people and we have institutions to help us watch our money. He says above that. More than the idea of your time. You know, we have all these devices. We have our smart phones and our Daytimers. I don't know if anybody uses those anymore but we have those things that help us keep track of our time. More than our relationships. More than watching our weight. More than all those things what are we to watch? We're to watch our heart, why? Because that's the real you. And when the heart is neglected everything else begins to suffer. Maybe that would be the first sign of a heart that's wandering from God.

Maybe another sign would be this attitude of a hyper-critical spirit, hyper-critical attitude. Have you ever noticed that? That when you get kind of hyper-critical, in other words, you're not giving grace to anybody and there's just kind of a complaining spirit about you? Something's going on in the inside. Something has set you off to cause you...maybe that's a sign that your heart is wandering from God.

I think one of the critical signs that we need to pay attention to is when we begin to compromise our values. It usually starts small. Have you noticed that? And it's usually things that we justify. We're doing something and we justify it but that begins to grow and we begin to compromise our values more and more and then our values suffer to the point where we're not just compromising our values we're compromising the Word of God. That ought to be a sign that our hearts are growing far from God. But I think the quintessential sign has to be just a basic diminishing desire for God; the desires that we have for God so diminish that we tend to drop out of things. We drop out church. We drop out of ministry. We drop out of praying. We drop out of studying the Word. We find ourselves not really interested. That ought to be an alarm that something's wrong at the heart. The reality is we know. I mean, you don't have to have someone tell you – you know on the inside when you sense that you're just far from God.

The question is – what causes it? What causes us to run from our wellspring? I'm going to show you. I want to take you to an Old Testament passage in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah, you might not be familiar with it speaks often about a heart that is wandering. It speaks about a nation's heart that is wandering. Now, I want you to try to find it. If you don't have a bible there's one in the chair back either in front of you or behind you. Just reach back and grab that. Find the book of Jeremiah. It's pretty easy. Just open your bibles to the center and you'll probably hit Psalm or Proverbs and then just start moving

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towards the New Testament. You're going to kind of go past Isaiah. Then you're going to hit Jeremiah. I want you to get to Jeremiah chapter 8. We're going to start in verse 5 but before we get there let me just give you some background.

I said that the book is written calling an entire nation whose heart is wandering to come back to their wellspring. You see, you have to understand a little bit of history before you understand the book of Jeremiah. The nation of Israel was once a unified nation under King David and King Solomon. It was a monarchy. Things were running very well. The hearts of the people were close to God. Solomon dies and all chaos lets loose. The nation divides from north to south – just right across its axis. And what we find is that the nations then, at that point start to deviate from their foundation of being people who follow after God and they start following lesser gods. They start following Pagan gods. And all throughout the Prophets of the Old Testament are calling them to come back and there are two dates that you really need to remember.

If you want to understand the Old Testament; understand the writings of the Old Testament essentially you need to understand two dates. The first date is 722 BC. In 722 BC the Assyrians conquer Israel. Israel is the northern kingdom. They conquer them and take all the people slavery. Now, what's interesting is if you read the prophets like Elijah, Amos, Hosea, Jonah all of them are warning that this day is coming. They're saying you've got to be careful. Your heart is wandering from God and God is going to punish you by sending a foreign army to take you away into captivity. Now you would think that would have caught the attention of the kingdom, of the other half of the monarchy but it doesn't. About two-hundred years later or so 586 BC, that's the second date. 586 BC Babylon conquers Judah and destroys, wipes out the capital of Jerusalem; takes all the people away in captivity just like what happened to Israel. Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Obadiah, Joel, Habakkuk they're talking to that group of people.

Now, follow me here. Alright. Jeremiah is talking to the nation before it falls into captivity and what is he saying? He's saying the exact same thing as all the other prophets. Listen, your heart is far from God. That's what he's saying to the nation. Return to God. Come back to God. Why was their heart far from God? What were the indications? Well, look here at verse 5. Now, this is God speaking through the prophet and He says, "Why then has this people turned away in perpetual back-sliding?" Stop there for a moment. Have you ever heard that word before? It's very Christian-eeze. If you've been a part of the church for any length of time you've heard of someone back-sliding. What does that mean? It's a rumspringa. That's all it is. It's where your heart is close to God for one moment and then you slide away from God; kind of seeking your own desires. That's what He means. He says that's what the people are doing. They're on a rumspringa. All of the nation's on a rumspringa.

He says this they hold fast to deceit. They refuse to return. I've paid attention and listened but they have not spoken rightly. No man relents from evil saying what have I done? Everyone turns to his own course like a horse plunging head-long into battle. What great imaging. I mean, those of you who are horse lovers, who own horses you know what it's like when the horse is full gallop. Imagine that all of these horses plunging into war. He says that's what the nation is like. They're plunging into evil. They're hearts

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are far from me. But why? What caused that? Well, back up. Look at the end of verse 5. We have a clue. He says they hold fast to deceit. That word deceit, actually, in the Hebrew could be translated allusion. They've bought into an allusion. They've bought into a lie that life is better without God. Isn't that the same lie that our adversary tricked our original parent, Adam and Eve into believing – that life is better without God; that you can manage without God. You know, that's a part of the human heart today.

I might have told you this. I can't remember. About a month ago Jack, my seven year old son in all seriousness walked out the door, stopped with the door open, turned around to me and said Dad, can I borrow the car. He was dead serious. He was totally frustrated when I told him no. And then he turned and said well, when can I have my own car then? He thinks, he believes, and maybe he can, he believes he can manage life on his own. That's exactly the same idea that our heart has and that's why the writer of proverbs says guard that. Guard against your heart wandering away.

Do you remember the story that Jesus told in the New Testament about another heart that was wandering far from God? You don't have to turn there. It's found in Luke chapter 15. Actually Jesus gives three parables back to back to back. It's about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. He gives the story about the prodigal son. Remember it. Let me just give you kind of an overview of it. Here is this boy who goes to his father and he says, basically, I don't really care about you. I want my inheritance now, which, in an eastern culture is like having your son say I wish you were dead. Imagine that. Now, there's a crowd of people listening to Jesus tell this story and I imagine at this point they were just astonished, aghast that anybody would have the tenacity to say that to their father. But then, they must have been blown away when Jesus said and his father gave the son his inheritance. Why would his father do that? Well, we can't be too hard on him because those of us who are parents, we understand this don't we? We understand when our children hurt us – that it causes a deep pain. And many times we will relent and give them what they want because we just don't want to manage the pain at that level. I think that is what was going on in the heart of this father. He was hurt so he gives the inheritance to his son and the son does exactly what you would imagine. Goes on a rumspringa. He's out. He goes into another country, takes his buddies along and they're having a great time. Of course. He's got all the money. So he's got all the money. He's got all the friends. He's got all the partying he wants. He's got all the women he wants until what? The money runs out and then Jesus, the master story teller adds another twist, doesn't he? He says, not only does all the money run out which means what? It means all the friends run out but there's a famine in the land. And now he's destitute. He doesn't know what to do. So, this Jewish boy does the unthinkable. He goes to a Gentile pig farmer and gets a job. How ironic. He's feeding slop to the pigs and somewhere in his mind, at some point he starts thinking about home. And he starts thinking my father's hired servants are treated better than I am. I wonder, and catch this – he starts to ask a critical question: I wonder if my father would hire me as one of his servants. In essence he's saying this. I'll translate. I wonder if I can go home. I wonder if I can return. That's what we often ask when we're wandering away from God; when we find our heart has wandered far from the wellspring we start to question whether we're even able to return. The son adds a little caveat. He says, I don't expect to go back as a son. I expect to go back in a lower level but maybe I could, just maybe I could go back at that level.

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Will you come with me for a moment over to Jeremiah chapter 3? Jeremiah 3 gives us the heart of God because in essence we ask the same question that the prodigal son asks. Can I return? In fact, an entire nation was asking the same question. Can we return? You need to understand something about the book of Jeremiah. All throughout the book of Jeremiah the prophet is saying you have wandered far from God. All throughout the book of Jeremiah, just almost right next to it you hear God saying you can return to me. You can come back to me.

It says here in Jeremiah, chapter 3, starting in verse 12 he says this is what, God says, this is what I want you to say Jeremiah. Go and proclaim these words towards the north and say return faithless Israel declares the Lord. Return. All throughout the book you hear God say your heart's far from me. Yet all throughout the book God says return. You can come back. Return. Listen to what he says. I'll not look on you in anger for I am merciful declares the Lord. I will not be angry forever only acknowledge your guilt that you rebelled against the Lord, your God and scattered your favors among foreigners under every green tree and that you have not obeyed my voice declares the Lord. Return. He says it again in the same paragraph. Return oh faithless children declares the Lord for I am your master and I will take you one from a city, two from a family and I will bring you to Zion. Zion is often the picture of Jerusalem, the home of God. He says I will allow you to come home. Come back to me. You can find this all throughout the book of Jeremiah over and over again. It's the same statement. It's the same sense of return to me my people who are wandering. Come back.

In fact, just hold your places. I'm not done in chapter 3 but come with me over to me to about the middle of the book – chapter 24. Jeremiah 24:7. And you get to see the sense of God and what He wants for them. He says in 24:7 I will give them a heart. There it is again. I will give, I will restore their heart; that wandering heart. I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart. Now how, how does a nation return? How do we return?

Well, flip back over to chapter 3 and I want you to look about verse 13 he tells us – only acknowledge your guilt. Acknowledge. Great Hebrew word (**yaw-dah יָדַע**). I means to see; to understand; to know. To know and to understand what? To understand our sin; to understand that our heart has wandered from God; to see as God sees; to agree with Him. In essence saying God, I understand I'm far from you and then we hear God says – come back to me. Return. But what else do we hear? We hear another voice inside of us. It's the voice of the prodigal son wondering can I return? We convince ourselves, certainly I can't go back at the same level. My heart has wandered so far away. I fall into so much sinfulness, certainly I can not return at that same level of intimacy that I had started this journey with. I must now deserve something less; a lower level just like the prodigal. And yet, what is the end of the story? What's the prodigal son, how does it come to a conclusion? Do you remember? The father. And this is the way I picture it. This man, middle-eastern man, long robe, dignified standing on his porch, looking at the horizon. Scanning, just waiting to see a familiar figure coming down the road. How long has he done this? A day?

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Two days? A week? A month? A couple years? We don't know but there's this sense that he's standing, waiting and don't miss this. The man standing on the porch in the story represents God. God's waiting for our return. The father is waiting for the son's return and what does the father do when he sees the son coming down the road? Does he prepare his lecture? Does he put his scolding face on? Is he ready to give it to him? No. He leaps off the porch and runs to his son and you have to understand the history. You have to understand the make up of the culture of the middle-eastern man who's in charge of the house does not run. That's undignified. But he doesn't care. He leaps off the porch and runs to his son and does what? Wraps his arms around him; takes his cloak off. Put's it on the son. Takes the signet ring off – puts it on the sons' hand. What does that signify? That you're home and that you're my son and he says my son who was dead has returned to me. You hear the pathos in the story. That's God. To the rumspringa heart of us all when we wander from God what does God do? He beckons us to return over and over again and then we think of returning; when we even turn towards Him He runs towards us in grace and mercy. And the New Testament counterpart of everything that you're reading about in Jeremiah is 1 John 1:9. If we confess with our mouth; we confess our sin He is righteous, He is faithful to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Do you hear that? The same is true for the nation of Israel; for the nation of Judah – this divided monarch. The same is true for us as followers of Christ today.

So, where's your heart? Have you found yourself wandering from God? And you hear the beckoning of the hymn writer: prone to wander, Lord I feel it; prone to leave the God I love. And then here God says come back. Come back so that I might wrap my arms around you and we might continue our journey together. That's your God. Now, let's pray together.