

Judgments and Vows

Fresh Start Podcast Transcription

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For those of you that are here for the first time tonight, Fresh Start is a ministry that is intended to help you resolve issues; issues of the heart. There are many issues in life, but we believe the most important issue, and what life is really all about, is relationship. So, that is the issue that we want to hone in on. That can take different forms in terms of how that applies to you. It can take the form of divorce or betrayal, abandonment, mistreatment, fill in the blank. Many and varied things could apply. Different losses: loss of a loved one, loss of health, loss of job, all kinds of loss issues that could apply that can affect our hearts. We do tend to live out of our hearts.

The Bible teaches the mouth speaks out of the abundance, out of the overflow of the heart. I believe the life lives out of the heart. Sooner or later, what is in your heart will come out. So, what is in our hearts? Anger, hurt, disappointment, all kinds of things could be there. Of course, what the Lord wants is for our hearts to be filled with love; His love, His love—sacrificial love, considering others more important than ourselves.

So, at Fresh Start, we want to help you process the issues of your heart; to help resolve all of the issues of the past. We really believe it's possible to be free. Free, free. It's possible for issues that have been painful and hurtful; it's possible for those to be resolved. It's possible because it is not dependent upon another human being. It doesn't make any difference what anybody else chooses. What matters is what we choose—what you choose, what I choose. Because what we choose will determine whether we are free on the inside. Free to live and love again, to resolve our past, to begin to thrive in the present and not just survive, not just get by, not just settle for the status quo, not just settle for mediocrity, but to actually flourish. But not have it dependent upon the circumstances because we cannot control the circumstances anyway, because circumstances can involve other people's choices and we cannot control their choices. But we do have a say in our choice. What will our choice be?

And then the future. Not only resolving the past, thriving in the present, but looking forward to the future. Not dreading today or the future. Not depressed, not down, but actually having anticipation in our hearts again. That is possible, so we want to communicate a message of

hope, a message of healing. And it's never too late—never, never, never too late—for a Fresh Start! And not just in the context of this ministry, but every day is a fresh start. When we get off the track, we can have a fresh start. It's a liberating perspective.

I want to talk about vows. Vows are like a promise. Now, there is more than one kind of vow. Vow can be a good thing. A vow can be a good thing, or a vow can be a very destructive thing. The key to whether it is a life-giving thing or a destructive thing is the condition of the heart. What kind of heart condition is the vow being spoken out of? So, I am going to set before you a contrast.

The first example is going to be a positive example of a vow. I have had the privilege, over my 20+ years as a Trinity pastor, to officiate at many weddings. I am going to quote some wedding vows. That is a very good thing. I pray that, even as I quote these wedding vows, that these will be a blessing to you. I realize that as I talk about certain things, it will not automatically be a blessing. When I start talking about God's design and how He would like things in our lives, we would hope that that would be good, that would be a blessing. But, it does not always affect us that way. Sometimes, when we hear how God wants things, we are reminded of how it has not been in our lives. That can be hurtful and it could stir some feelings of anger, even, or disappointment or other things because we are reminded, "That's not the kind of marriage I have, and I don't like it." Or, "What kind of marriage I did have," if you have been previously married and divorced. But, here would be an example of a positive vow. I am going to start with the groom. Even as I recite these tonight, I am going to make a personal application in my own life. I have been married to my wonderful wife for approaching 31 years. Her name is Mindy, she's wonderful, I love her more every day. I am passionately in love with her and she with me, and that is a gift from the Lord. So, even as I say these tonight, I will have Mindy in mind. So, it will be kind of a renewal. So, I am going to assume that she is here. In fact, she is here, she is right back there.

I, Steve, take you, Mindy, to be my wedded wife. With deepest joy, I receive you into my life, that together we may be one. Always will I give my leadership to you, even as Christ does to me. Knowing that His plan is one of Godly love and holiest desires for my life. I give you my most sincere love, my unselfish devotion, and my most tender care. I promise that I will keep Christ first in our home and I will strive to direct our lives always into a life of faith and hope in Christ Jesus. Therefore Mindy, Honey, throughout life—no matter what may lie ahead of us—I pledge to you that I will be a loving and faithful husband. That is easy. Because I love you, that is an easy promise to keep because I am speaking that out of a heart of love. That

is the condition of my heart. So, I am renewing that vow. I am renewing that eternal promise out of love, a heart of love.

I will go ahead and say it on Mindy's behalf, just to illustrate: I, Mindy, take you, Steve, to be my wedded husband. With deepest joy, I come into my new life together with you. As you have promised me your life and love, so I entrust my life to you and confidently submit myself to your loving headship, as to the Lord. As the church is in her relationship to Christ, so will I be to you. I will be devoted to you, honor you, and seek to please you. I know that God has prepared me for you and as your wife, I will seek to strengthen, help, comfort and encourage you. Therefore throughout life, I pledge to you my life as a loving and supportive wife.

So, whether it is the husband, whether it is the wife, a vow spoken out of love is a good thing. It is not a promise to a promise; it is not a commitment to a commitment. It is not a burden at all, is it? A vow spoken out of love is not a burden at all; it is a blessing.

The Bible teaches us not to take vows lightly. If you are going to make a vow, we need to have every intention of keeping that vow. There is great power in a promise. There is great power in a vow. Now, what I have shared with you so far is a very positive thing and it is spoken out of a heart of love.

Now, on the other hand, just to contrast: a vow spoken out of hurts, wounds, or bitterness is also a very powerful thing. So, I want you to be open to allow the Lord to speak to you tonight. As a part of our process of processing the issues of the heart, ask the Lord, even as I share more tonight, are there any vows in you of a destructive kind? In other words, a vow in the face of being hurt, in the face of being wounded, you have made an inner promise that you will never allow yourself to get close to anybody again; you will not give your heart to anybody again; you will never allow yourself to be in a situation to be abandoned or left or hurt again. Now, keep in mind, who wants to get hurt? Who wants to be abandoned? Who wants to be wrong? Nobody.

Now, let me quote some things just to see what you are thinking. Right now, I am involved in a men's group and we are touching on a book called *Wild at Heart* by John Eldridge. As I was reading this the other day, I thought, you know, I just cannot improve on how he is saying it, so I might as well just quote him [laughter] because he says it so well. He says, "You remember back in chapter 4, I described the vow many of us make after we are wounded. A

vow that in some way protects us from ever being hurt again, so we think. The only thing more tragic than the tragedy that happens to us is the way we handle it.” Think about how you have been wronged, think about how you have been abused, abandoned, rejected, whatever applies to you. I am taking that very seriously. I am not minimizing that in the least. And the Lord is taking that seriously. He is the God Who sees. He weeps with those who weep and rejoices with those who rejoice. So, His heart is broken as well. But, how do we handle it? How do we respond? The choices we make, the person we become, the life we live or do not live, has to do with how we handle it.

Do not think for a moment that how you are treated is what defines you, unless you allow it to define you. The things we do to protect and preserve our hearts usually end up hurting us more. To choose to shut your heart to love so that you will not be hurt is to deny the very thing that you were made for. Isn't that ironic? We were made by God, in His image and likeness. We are not animals. We have intellect. We have the ability to feel and think and reason. We have the power to choose. We have creative ability. We are made in the image and likeness of God. We aren't got, but we were made in the image and likeness of God. We are made for relationship and one of our God-given appetites is to love and to be loved. So, to choose to shut our hearts to love so that we won't be hurt, that we won't risk being hurt again, is to deny the very thing that we were made for. To demand perfection of yourself so that no one will ever criticize you again is to lay an intolerable burden on your back. And then he goes on to say, and this is what I want to invite you into. If you have made a vow of the type that I am talking about, not a vow out of love, but a vow out of woundedness, a vow out of bitterness, a vow out of unforgiveness, a vow out of rejection, you must reject that vow. Deliberately. Even out loud. I think it will help you clarify and hear it, so to speak, hear yourself. I love how he says this, it's so true. It's so powerfully true. "The vow is a kind of agreement with the lie. For example, the lie might have been, 'You're on your own.'—" and you can see how that comes about. You get hurt—abandoned, rejected, abused, alcoholic father, maybe you have had an abusive father or mother, divorce, things ripped apart, torn apart, abuse of different kinds—the stage is set! In the midst of betrayal, broken trust, woundedness, broken promises, the stage is set for us to buy into the thought, "You're on your own. You can't trust anybody around here. And God let it happen! You can't trust Him, either! You're on your own. You're the only one that you can count on!" That's a lie. "You're on your own," and the vow says, "Ok, I will never trust anyone again. Never let them close." That sort of agreement gives permission, notice how powerful this is, that sort of agreement gives a kind of permission, for the enemy—Satan or one of his demons—to set up shop in that place in our hearts. I am not trying to spook you out, I'm not trying to be mystical, I just want to be honest.

Yes, there are things that on a human level we need to major on taking personal responsibility, true, true, true. But, there is also an unseen battle going on for your soul. Just as surely as God made us for Himself, for a relationship with Him, died on the cross for our sins, there is an adversary that wants to destroy us and he is willing to take 10, 20, 30 years, he is very patient, whatever it takes to deceive us and trap us, snare us, or bring us down. I'm not saying that our focus should be on him, but our eyes do need to be open. The enemy will set up shop there. When we make this kind of an agreement, it acts as a kind of covenant. It's interesting. The vow becomes a covenant with independence. Independence. I would also say, a vow of this type is like a statement of control: I'm going to be in control. Isn't that interesting, that would be our response? Because, it's because it has been out of our control and we have been hurt by it, wounded by it, maybe even devastated by it, what is our response? "I'm going to be in control!" That's the spirit of that vow. That's the attitude of that vow. It becomes a covenant with independence and therefore, it is sin. Therefore, it gives the enemy a place of great influence that we don't even realize, perhaps, to deceive us in ways we don't even realize we are being deceived or blinded.

Do you see how dangerous that is? Okay, here is what we need to do. This is a part of the process of processing the issues of our heart. Who or what has offended you or what have you lost? Maybe many have, pick one. Breaking the vow is your way of cancelling all agreements with the lie and taking back any ground you gave to the enemy. It releases your soul for Christ to come in. This is something you must do, for Christ will not violate your will. You made the vow or I made the vow. You must renounce it, I must renounce it. It must be deliberate. You may think, "Well, isn't it enough just to ask for forgiveness? Okay, I see it, I was wrong, this was my response: 'I'm going to be in control. My life's gotten out of control, no more. I'm going to be in control, nobody is going to hurt my anymore.'" Okay, that's wrong. 'I confess it as sin, Lord, please forgive me.' Isn't that enough?" You're on the right track, but it's incomplete, because renouncing it takes a step further. It is humbling yourself, yes. It's asking for forgiveness, yes. The Lord loves to forgive, yes. But, when you renounce it, you're cutting yourself off from it. You don't want anything to do with it. You are not only repenting of it, you are forsaking it, you are rejecting it. You don't want any connection, any association, any influence. No bridge, no stronghold of the enemy, no place where he can set up shop and deceive you. And, as you have heard me say before if you have heard me address this, when you put a wall up like this, as you steel yourself in with steel, so to speak, a steel of protection, "seal or steel," if you will, seal or steel your heart off in that way, don't think for a moment that it is limiting or insulating you just with people, just from people. We are also insulating ourselves from the One Who is Love. Because it is not a wall that just goes

[horizontally,] it is a wall that goes up [vertically]. We protect ourselves from people, but we also put a barrier up between the Lord and us and we desperately need his love. But, in the name of protection, in the name of independence, in the name of "I'm not going to get hurt again" we isolate ourselves, we insulate ourselves and we make ourselves so much more vulnerable to the lies of the enemy. The enemy loves to get you (and me) alone. He likes to deal with us alone so that he can whisper lies into our ears and nobody is around to call attention to it, nobody is around to expose it because we're thinking, we're feeling, we're preoccupied. After all, we know what's happened, we've experienced it. "They don't know! This other person, they don't understand, anyway! They haven't been through what I've been through anyway! So, only I understand it, anyway!" That's exactly where he wants to get you: alone. So he can lie to you, isolate you, and destroy you. Are you going to let that happen? I hope not.

As a part of the process of processing the issues of the heart, which for many will lead to forgiveness, a part of that process may need to include what I am talking about tonight. If you have made a vow—maybe you didn't realize you made that vow, because it wasn't like you said, "Okay, I'm going to make a vow now. I've been hurt, I've been wounded, and I'm going to make a vow!" You probably didn't even think of it that way. But, regardless of whether I call it a vow, an inner promise, don't stumble over my choice of words. I hope you're hearing the essence of what I am saying. You've been hurt. You've been wounded. You've been rejected. You've been betrayed. You know what you've experienced. What has your response been? If it's, "I'll never—" "I'll always—" and if it's not out of love, it's out of bitterness, it's out of woundedness. It's not the marriage vow of love that I just spoke of earlier, but it's an inner promise to yourself in the name of independence, in the name of protection, in the name of control. If this applies to you, give up control. Renounce the vow. Reject it. Forsake it.

I'm going to offer a prayer. You don't have to agree with this prayer, I'm not trying to make it a rote prayer, but I'm going to pray a prayer out loud and if you can agree with that, or after I am done reading a prayer that he has offered in the book, if you want to pray a prayer from your heart that better fits you, by all means, make that the issue. Sometimes we don't know what to do, we say, "Okay, I see it, but now what?" So, we need some coaching. But, I'm not trying to do it for you, I'm not trying to put words in your mouth. I just want to lay before you the opportunity. You see it and now you want to do something about it, here it is. I'll read this prayer out loud and if this is something you can own, if this is something you can embrace

for you, then please do. Then add to it whatever does more personally and appropriately apply to you. So, here it is:

"Jesus, I renounce every vow I have made to seal off my wound, to protect myself from further pain. Reveal to me what those vows were. I break every agreement that I have made with the lies that came with my wounds, the lies of Satan. And I make all agreement with You, Jesus. I agree with You, Jesus. I give the protection of my heart and soul back to You. Lord, You protect my heart. I'm not going to protect my heart any more. I trust You to protect my heart. I trust you with all that is within me. In Jesus' name."

Take a few moments and ask the Lord to reveal any vows that haven't already come to mind.

I hope you see what the tradeoff is. If you have a vow, you have been the guardian of your heart. So, by renouncing that vow, you are saying, "I'm not going to be the protector of my heart any more. I'm going to let You protect my heart, Lord." I hope you realize this: You will be hurt again. I guarantee it. You will feel rejected again, disappointed, let down. You will be wronged again. You will be let down again. And you will probably be betrayed again. It is inevitable. It is life on planet earth. I'm not saying it's right. I'm not saying God wants it. But, it will happen. But, if you entrusted your heart to the care and protection of God, you will also have the Comforter that is a far better comforter than we are. Because you know what we comfort with? We comfort with sex, usually out of bounds. We comfort with alcohol. We comfort with good things, bad things, destructive things or constructive things. The key is, they become substitutes for Him. That's what makes them idols. That's how we comfort. When you are the god of your own comfort, you do it with idols. There is a risk, but it will be our loss if we're not willing to take this risk.

If you allow your heart to be cold and hard and independent, you lose. You lose. The Lord doesn't want you to lose, He wants you to win.

This will open the door to give the Lord an opportunity to transform your heart. He will not transform a heart that's closed off to Him. He won't force the issue. So, when you renounce a vow or vows, among other things, you open the door. You give up control. You let Him be the Guardian. You let Him be the Door of your heart. That is His right. That is His place.