

THE HEART OF THE MATTER



*A series of sermons by
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The Heart Of The Matter - Chapter 1

"The Disease Of The Heart"

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Now we're turning today, in the beginning of this study 'The Heart of the Matter', to a verse that speaks from the words of God about the diseased heart that is in the human being. We're turning to Jeremiah, his prophecy in chapter 17 and a well known verse to us all. Jeremiah chapter 17 and our text is verse 9, but we're going to read from verse 1 to understand the context of God's message to us. Jeremiah chapter 17 and verse 1, and God says through His prophet: "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars; Whilst their children remember their altars and their groves by the green trees upon the high hills. O my mountain in the field, I will give thy substance and all thy treasures to the spoil, and thy high places for sin, throughout all thy borders. And thou, even thyself, shall discontinue from thine heritage that I gave thee; and I will cause thee to serve thine enemies in the land which thou knowest not: for ye have kindled a fire in mine anger, which shall burn for ever. Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places the land that is not inhabited, the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope is in the Lord. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit" - and here's our text - "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool".

Let us pray: Our Father we thank Thee this day for Thine own inspired truth, we thank Thee that it is reliable, we can trust it. We thank Thee that we know, and we believe in the depths of our being, that it is God breathed. And therefore we pray that there would be no-one that would reject the word of God in this place today, or they will be described as a fool. Help us to understand what Thou wouldst have us know, and lead us and teach us by the Holy Spirit - the greatest commentator and applier of the word of God that there is. Bless us now as we wait on Thee, and fill with Thy Holy Ghost we pray. In Jesus name. Amen.

I believe that the human being has an innate and constant ability of self-flattery. Listen to that statement: the human being has an innate and constant tendency of self-flattery. Do you believe that? We perceive things to be better than they really are. Why do I say that? I apply it, not just to those in the world outside of Christ, but to those within the church of Jesus Christ - that they believe that today, in the grace of God, in their Christian life, they are better than yesterday and the day before and perhaps the decade before. We all tend to flatter ourselves, and tell ourselves that things aren't as bad, perhaps, as often we think they are. What is the reason for me making this statement? Can I back it up with the word of God? Well I hope I can, from Jeremiah chapter 17 and verse 9, look at it: 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?' Many people have forgotten that they have a diseased heart.

We often ask the question together, and especially in the place of prayer: why is it that today, within the church of Jesus Christ, there is a weakening of the Gospel? Why is there a weakening of our understanding and our view of the sinfulness of sin? Why do we weaken in understanding of what it is to live a holy and a godly life in the fear and admonition of the Lord? Why is it, in the day in which we live, there is a lack of soul winning and souls coming to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith? Why is it that believers seem to be able to live absolutely unconscious of eternity and the judgement seat of Christ? I believe all of those misgivings are perhaps found in one reason, and that is: a misconception of ourselves, and indeed a misunderstanding of the hearts that are within us.

If you look at this passage of scripture, you will see that Jeremiah - as you read the whole book of Jeremiah and I trust that you have at some time in your life - you will find out that Jeremiah was a priest and a prophet. You will also find out that Jeremiah remained unmarried, for one reason - to show the children of Judah that God was dissatisfied and displeased with them, and He was severing Himself from them. He is described as the weeping prophet - and indeed he entitles one of his books 'The book of Lamentations', why? Because it's a book of weeping and wailing over the situation, and the condition of God's people of Judah in their particular day. And we find as we read through the prophecy of Jeremiah that, because of Jeremiah's preaching, because of the fact that he proclaimed the undiluted word of God, he was persecuted for it. He preached judgement, he told the children of Judah that Babylon was going to come and wreck the whole of Jerusalem, and the whole of their nation, and that would be the judgement of God. Because of it Jeremiah was tried for life, he was put in the stocks, he was thrown into a pit, and many times he was publicly humiliated before his nation, for one reason and one reason only, listen - he was a preacher of repentance.

When we preach repentance, as one has said, we will find our head on the platter - like John the Baptist. And any man or woman who decides to preach God's Gospel of repentance and faith in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ will suffer persecution. And Jeremiah proclaimed, eventually, that not only was God threatening judgement, but that God's judgement was eminent and Babylon was going to come - and He even warned the people, 'Don't fight against Babylon, because it's coming. God has decreed that it must be so because of your sin'. What was Judah's sin? And why would God judge His own people in such a way? If you turn to chapter 2 of Jeremiah, you find that Judah had begun to delve into idol worship, the gods of other nations, false gods who had demons behind them. We find also, throughout the book of Jeremiah, that they began to delve into child sacrifice. They'd taken the gods of other nations and they were now offering their own kith and kin, boys and girls, their own seed and offspring to these false gods in the Valley of Henon, just outside Jerusalem. We find also that if you read the book of Jeremiah, that they began to worship the queen of heaven - a false god who many worship in the Roman Catholic faith today. And we find that also there was a reformation in Judah and that God had His man Josiah, and Josiah began to try and change many of the things that sinful men had brought into the nation and into the Israel of God of that day. One by one he began to change these awful sinful transgressions and abominations in the sight of God. But as we reflect, in hindsight, and as the Holy Spirit reflects within the word of God, looking back on that reformation we find that it was only an outward reformation. Why is it that many of the reformations of God's people are only outward? The reason is that the problem is not outward, the problem is inward, the problem is the disease of the heart. The problem is not simply on the skin surface, but it goes deeper than that, the deadly cancer is deep within the soul - and we read this book and we find that they had dabbled in religious apostasy, insincerity, dishonesty, adultery, injustice and slander of one another and because of it God says, in verse 1 of chapter 17: 'The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron'.

The pen of iron was the instrument used to engrave the name of the god upon the bottom of the god. And God says to them, 'Your sin is written in stone before Me'. But it is more severe than that - if you look at the rest of verse 1 you find that it is written with the point of a diamond, it is graven upon the table of their heart, upon the horns of your altars. If you go into the first five books of the Bible you find that the horns of the altar was the place on which the blood of atonement was to be put. Do you see what God is saying to His

people? 'Your sin is where the blood ought to be!' - and my friend if you're here and you're not converted, or you are backslidden, your sin is in the face of God who is holy. And the blood ought to cover your sin, but if the blood is not covering your sin, just as it was not for the children of Judah, God's judgement is inevitable.

What an awful picture we have before us today. God also told them in verse 4 that they would forfeit the land, the land that was promised to Abraham - the promised land - they would forfeit it because of their sin and they would be carried away to Babylon as captives. Turn with me to Romans chapter 11, Romans chapter 11 - and let me say before we read this passage of Scripture, that I believe wholeheartedly in the eternal security of the believer, but I often think that we skip over some of these verses and don't really delve into the meaning of what they say. And in Romans chapter 11 we have the picture of Israel, and Israel is described as a branch that has been broken off for a little season, because of their disobedience, because they rejected the Lord Jesus Christ as Messiah - 'He came unto His own and His own received Him not'. They have been broken away for a season and Gentiles have been ingrafted in, other branches. Now let's look at this and let's understand what it is saying, verse 18, and Paul is saying to us Gentiles and to the Romans he is speaking to: 'Boast not against the branches' - don't boast against Israel - 'But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee'.

I believe that once you're saved, you're always saved. But I also believe the verse in which we have read from, and I believe that it is there, and Paul meant it to be there, and the Holy Spirit means it to be there, so that we will sit up and listen. And as we look at the children of Judah and think of their sin and think of their hardened hearts against God, if we fail to see our own hearts and our own sin we have failed miserably. Can we all say: The dearest idol I have known, whate'er that idol be, help me to tear it from Thy throne, and worship only Thee?

What is the heart? The Bible definition of the heart is not the physical organ that pumps blood around our bodies, but the Bible describes it as the citadel of man, the seat of his dearest treasures and affections. It is described as the mind, the centre of thinking and reason, the place where emotion evolves and the will is exercised. It is the source of all decisions, all wisdom, it is the depositary of all effects of speech and conduct that we have. It is the very source of everything that we are as human beings. What does Jeremiah say? That it is deceitful, above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? And I want us, for the moments that remain, to look at this subject of the diseased heart.

Jeremiah, and God, says first of all: that the heart has ultimate deceptiveness, '...it is deceitful above all things...'. Secondly: it has desperate wickedness, '...and desperately wicked...', God says. And thirdly: it has infinite elusiveness, '...Who can know it?'. Let us look at its ultimate deceptiveness. And what God is saying here, and what Jeremiah is saying [is] that it is foolishness, it is absolute folly, to trust in men and women - and you would concur with that, wouldn't you? That we don't trust in men and women, or at least we ought not. And that's what these children of Judah were doing, they were trusting in the arm of flesh, as we read from verse 5, 6 and 7. They were not trusting in God, they were trusting in their brothers and their sisters, in the Israel of God. Why is it foolishness to trust in one another? Because God says we are frail - and not only are we frail, but we are false and we are deceitful and deceptive, and at the very moment when we think that we are trusting in God, just like Judah, is the very time when we are not trusting God, and the time when we are deceiving ourselves - why? Because the heart is deceitful above all things!

Matthew Henry put it like this: 'Our hopes and fears rise or fall according to second causes, as they shrink or frown'. In other words, our happiness is depending, not [on] what is in our heart, but depending upon our environment and what is happening to us. Depending on whether the secondary sources, as Henry says, rises or frowns upon us. That is what the word happiness means isn't it? It's the old Anglo-Saxon word 'hapness' -

and 'hap' describes luck, or chance, or circumstances that come into our life, and it describes how we determine our disposition within our soul and our spirit by what is happening around us in our circumstances. God says that our hearts are deceitful in that way. He tells us, first of all, that our heart is deceitful by its very nature. That we are unconscious, that we are so wicked - unconscious wickedness, not aware - we don't even suspect the sin that at times is in our breast and in our being. That's why He said, 'Deceitful above all things'. That is ultimate deceitfulness! Above everything that there is, our hearts are deceitful. It is subtle, it is false, it is like Jacob whose name is 'the supplanter', it is a twister, and a liar, and a deceiver.

How can we know the evidence that our hearts are deceitful? We can see it by the fruit of our hearts. As another prophet said, 'When they call evil good and good evil'. When men in society, and within the church of Jesus Christ, put a false colour on something, you can be sure it is proof of a diseased heart. And when men say 'Peace, peace', when there is no peace!

I have been heavily burdened by my own sinfulness. And I know that when repentance is preached, and when sin is preached, even within the church of God there is murmuring, there is complaining. But my friend that is a sure sign that you do not know your heart. It is deceitful above all things! Jesus says, in Mark chapter 7, if you want to turn to it, verse 21: 'For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile a man.

The world is concerned about happiness today, but as A.W. Tozer put it: 'God is more concerned with the state of people's hearts, than with the state of their feelings'. Our hearts are deceitful - do you notice the Lord Jesus didn't even stop to prove that fact? He stated it, because it is self evident from the way we live. And when you're in the garden and you see hornets flying from a rotting log in the corner of the garden, you immediately say, 'There must be a nest there', when you see them flying to and fro. And when we see sins flying in and out of our hearts, we must say, not that the sin is coming out of us, but the sin is within us.

We are deceitful by nature, and we are also deceitful in our hearts by choice. If you look at verses 7 and 6 of this passage of scripture, you see that these men and women have chosen to go in this direction, because he shows it up by the conduct of a godly man: 'Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope is in the Lord'. There is a choice, the will has made a choice to walk not after God - and isn't that right? Isn't it in the heart of men that men whisper to themselves, 'There is no God!?' Isn't it within the heart that they decide that God does not see them in their life of sin? Isn't it in the heart that they decide that there will be no judgement after death, they will have no account of their sins? And isn't it in the heart that the believer says to himself: 'I will be blessed in my life of sin'? And it is the heart that cheats men and women to their ruin. And man's doom is not just because he is a sinner by nature, but he is a sinner by choice also - he is a self-deceiver and a self-destroyer. His heart, within him, in the depths of who he is, is ultimately deceptive!

Jeremiah goes on, secondly, to say that it has desperate wickedness. One translates it like this: 'It has incurability, it is mortally sick, there is nothing that can help the desperate wickedness of the heart'. The heart is often alluded to within the scriptures as the conscience. I want you to think of the magnitude of this. That if the conscience of men and women, which has been put into our beings to put things right that are wrong, is wrong itself!...what hope is there for a man? If the mother of all righteousness, put into men and into Adam in the beginning to tell him right from wrong, becomes the mother of all falsehood, what will happen to man? It is like a ruler that is too short! It's like a balance that is uneven! It's like a clock that is too slow! And I ask the question of us all today: what will happen to a man or a woman when the candle of the Lord is giving a false light? When God's deputy within the soul is deceiving men and women because of the deceitfulness of their heart and the ultimate wickedness of it - it is like the lighthouse guiding ships into their

doom in the rocks! J.C. Ryle said, and he said well, that '...sin and the devil will always find helpers in our hearts...', because they are deceitful above all things and desperately, desperately wicked.

Our hearts have ultimate deceptiveness and desperate wickedness. And thirdly, they have infinite elusiveness. One man translated it like this: 'Who can perceive your heart? Who can understand? Who can be acquainted with his own heart and his own mind?' What Jeremiah is saying is, 'I don't even know myself!'. Do you feel like that sometimes? A thought comes into your mind or into your heart, or you're tempted to sin in a certain way, or maybe you fall into a certain sin and you think to yourself: 'Why did I do that? Why did I contemplate that? Why am I found in this sin, it's not like me?'. The reason why you say that is because you don't know you. And because the heart is infinite in its elusiveness - and I want you to see this - that who asks this question? Look at the verse: 'The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?' - who is asking the question? God! God is asking the question! God, who knows all things, omniscient, who is everywhere and who sees into your heart at this moment, is asking: 'Who can know your heart?'

Now I'm not suggesting that God does not know, for we find that God begins to answer that question - but He wants to show us the depths of the elusiveness, the deceptiveness, and the wickedness of the human heart. He is saying that we cannot describe how bad it is. We can't know how we'll behave when we're faced with temptation - and Peter's an example, he thought that he would die for the Lord, he would go all the way to the cross for the Lord, and when it came to the bit he betrayed the Lord three times. Romans 7, Paul testifies the things that he wanted to do, he couldn't do and the things he didn't want to do, he did and he declares, in a note of frustration and agony: 'Oh! Wretched man that I am!'. We all feel like that at times, as believers, and you can see clearly that the Israelites and Judah were foolish in trusting other men, because God was telling them that you can't even trust yourself. And why do we look to other men, when we can't even trust the heart that is within us? It has infinite elusiveness. But God is directing us by the Holy Spirit in this verse, to see that He can see the heart! He can understand the heart! It is not blind to Him, it does not baffle Him! Look at verse 10: 'I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings'. 'I the Lord search the heart', God knows our hearts, God sees our hearts, all our thoughts, all our feelings, the common ones, the very rare ones, the motives, the intents of our being, the things that we cleverly and artfully disguise, and industrially conceal from those around us, the nearest and dearest to us - God knows! He says not only does He know, but He weighs it. 'I try the reins', I put what I know into My holy balances and I judge you and your heart. It is like Belshazzar and his drunken orgy, that the finger of God writes upon all our hearts, 'Thou art weighed and found wanting'.

But I want to finish on a beautiful note: that we are to do what the Psalmist tells us in Psalm 4 and verse 14, listen: 'Stand in awe, and commune with your heart'. As you see all of this, and you see - as Calvin says, that: 'The recesses of the heart of man are so hidden, that no judgement can be formed only, or by any, human being' - and you see the heart's deceitfulness and elusiveness - and you hear what Spurgeon says, listen: 'There is enough tinder in the heart of the best of men in the world, to light a fire that shall burn to the lowest hell'. Unless God should quench the sparks as they fall, there is enough corruption, depravity and wickedness in the heart of the most holy man that is now alive to damn his soul to all eternity, if the free and sovereign grace does not prevent it. And as we stand in awe of our own diseased, sinful hearts and wonder at it, isn't it wonderful to know that God, who searches our hearts and weighs our hearts, listen: is greater than our hearts?!

Turn with me, to 1 John chapter 3 and verse 20, 1 John chapter 3 and verse 20, he says: 'For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things' - there is hope! Your heart does condemn you, my heart condemns me when I sin because I know it is a diseased heart - but praise the Lord, God is greater! Our God is greater than sin! Our God is greater than man's depravity! Our God is holier than to look upon iniquity! Yet when my heart condemns me, my God is able to save me!

I was reading this morning in my devotions from Psalm 45, look at it for a moment. Psalm 45, and in verse 1 we read this: 'My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever', verse 7, 'Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows'. Our heart is diseased! Our heart is without hope! God is holy of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and His Son the lovely Lord Jesus Christ was sent to earth - pure, spotless, separate from sinners and undefiled, knew no sin, did no sin, thought no sin, and could not sin! God help anyone who believes that our lovely Lord Jesus could sin. If that was the case, it were possible for the sovereign throne of Heaven to topple and the ceiling of it to fall in - it cannot happen! And do you know one of the reasons why it cannot happen? Because He is our only hope! Without Him we have nothing! In all His purity, in all His righteousness He is our hope and there at Calvary's cross on a ragged, limestone rock outside Jerusalem, my filthy, diseased heart was plundered! Was cleansed! And it was given back to me a new heart! Isn't that wonderful? My friend, if you're not converted today, that can happen to you. That can happen, for God to say: 'A new heart also will I give you, a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh' - God is able to do that! We will never appreciate the full and adequate atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ until we understand the total, utter depravity of mankind. When you look from the heights of heaven, that you are in today believer, to the depths of hell that Christ has pulled you from - isn't it amazing?! Can you shout 'Hallelujah'? How wonderful our Saviour is! The diseased heart that the Great Physician can heal, can cleanse and He gives us a heart transplant!

No wonder Madame Guyon wrote this in her poetry:

'My spirit and faculties fail.
Oh, finish what love has begun!
Destroy what is sinful and frail,
And dwell in the soul Thou hast won.

Dear theme of my wonder and praise.
I cry, who is worthy as Thou?
I can only be silent and gaze,
'Til all that is left to me now'.

Faber put it like this:

'Each proof renewed of Thy great love,
Humbles me more and more,
And brings to light forgotten sins
And lays them at the door.
And the more I love Thee Lord,
The more I hate my own cold heart.
The more Thou woundest me with love,
The more I feel the smart!'

We ought to see our hearts as despised, to see them as deceitful, to see them as wicked, and to see them as absolutely elusive. But my friend, can I ask you today - whether you are inside of Christ or outside of Christ - what will you do with your heart? Will you keep it yourself, believe everything it says and live by it day by day, or will you give it up to God? Will you give it up to God today, and let Him take it and make it a new heart, to the glory of God?

I'm very conscious today that there could be those, who have never dealt with their sinful, diseased hearts, and let Christ change them into new creatures. And if you have heard the voice of God speaking to you today, His love constrains you to come, why not receive Him? For to them that receive Him, He gives the power to become the sons of God. And Christian today, when we contemplate what the Lord Jesus went through there at Calvary's cross, to plunder our hearts and to make them new - oh, let us walk in holiness and in godliness after our Lord.

Our Father, we thank Thee for the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the incurable heart, the One who shed His blood to wash us clean, that we may stand one day in white robes, presented faultless before the throne of Thy glory, oh God. We thank Thee that from the depths You heard our cry, and lifted us out of the miry clay and set us on a rock. Help us never to cease to praise Thee, help us never to lose the thrill of our salvation. In Jesus name. Amen.

The Heart Of The Matter - Chapter 2
"The Heart That God Broke To Mend"

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We're turning to a passage of Scripture that Carl has already alluded to in his talk to the children, 1 Samuel, chapter 1. And of course you will know that this is the story, the biography, of the beginning of this man of God, Samuel. And we're looking specifically at this woman, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, and our title today is "The Heart That God Broke To Mend". And we see, right at the beginning of this passage of Scripture, that this woman Hannah had a broken heart. So let's read our reading together - all of chapter 1 and the first verse of chapter 2.

Verse 1 of 1 Samuel 1: "Now there was a certain man of Ramathaimzophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite: And he had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there. And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the Lord had shut up her womb. And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat. Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? And why eatest thou not? And why is thy heart grieved? Am not I better to thee than ten sons? So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the Lord. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head. And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from thee. And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto. Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him. And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad. And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the Lord, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the Lord remembered her. Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord. And the man Elkanah, and all his house, went up to offer unto the Lord the yearly sacrifice, and his vow. But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever. And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the Lord establish his word. So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him. And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour,

and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh: and the child was young. And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him: Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there. And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation".

There is a saying that we often hear 'If it's not broken, don't fix it'. If it's not broken, don't fix it - and you could put that into a better phrase: 'If it's not broke, don't break it'. [If] something's alright, don't put your hand to it and mess it up and break the whole thing, and it's in a worse state once you've touched it than when it was before. And we look at this passage of scripture and that might be the cry that we give to God as we read it, about this woman Hannah. This woman, presumably, throughout the beginning of her life was fine - she hadn't a broken heart. But after she was married, and it was found that she couldn't give birth to children, she had a broken heart. There are many folk in the world today and even in this Assembly as we sit and meet in this building, who have broken hearts before God.

We live in a world that is broken and indeed, as you look at a map of the world and you see that once in time past the whole world was one piece of land, and through whatever means you want to call it, it broke up into little islands and little continents - it speaks metaphorically, to me anyway, of how the world has been broken up by sin. Right in the beginning of the book of Genesis, we see that languages came into being - why? Because of sin. Nations have been broken apart and formed because of sin - and within our lives there is this brokenness and often its cause or its means in the beginning has been sin. And we know that all suffering comes from sin, original sin in the Garden. We know that death, the maximum suffering, comes from that father of sin, and we have a world and a church of Jesus Christ that is broken by sin. Many of our families are affected by alcoholism and drug abuse. Many of us have been touched, whether personally or relationally within our family, by adultery, by murder, by divorce, by perhaps childlessness - the anxiety of this very woman, Hannah. Many of us have had to look at children that were brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord but only to depart from the faith, only to depart from the way their mother and father led them on. Many of us have broken hearts because of bereavement, because of illness of body, whether it be physical, or mental or emotional. Many of us could say as we sit here - maybe others don't know about it - we could testify that we have broken hearts!

What do we do as Christians with our broken hearts? We know what the world does, they run after psychiatrists and psychologists and counselling, they read books here and there - and I'm not saying that that is all wrong - but what do we do as believers? Do we follow the example of the world and try to find satisfaction and salve in the things that they do? Or do we do what is laid down within the word of God? Is it a different way that we approach our sorrow and our heartache? Is the first thing that we do, to take it to our husband or our wife, to go to our mother or father, or our best friend or our children and to confide in them - or do we do as we've been singing, as Joseph Scribbens said, do we 'take it to the Lord in prayer'?

If we were to learn that life is impossible without God, we would learn a very valuable lesson. I'm talking as Christians now, if we were to realise that we cannot live a moment without God, that we cannot take a step without Him, that we cannot breathe a breath or think a thought without His knowledge and His almighty ability. And when we realise that and practice that within our lives, when we find ourselves like Hannah in agony and distress, it doesn't break us but it makes us! You see, Hannah took her agony to God. Hannah agonised her thoughts and her feelings before the throne of grace - where do you take your pain? Where do you go in your moments of distress? Where do you look for answers from? Is it to the face and the throne of God that you go when your heart is in pieces?

There is a heart that is in pieces in this passage. If you look a verse 8, you see a heart that is in pieces: 'Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepst thou? And why eatest thou not? And why is thy heart grieved?'. We always must look at the context of any passage of scripture and [when] we look at the context of this little book, you find that it speaks of the nation of Israel in deep distress. And you could mirror the barrenness of Hannah's womb with the spiritual barrenness of Israel as a nation before God. As you go on within this book you find that the priesthood is corrupt - Hophni and Phinehas that are mentioned within this passage, they are Egyptian names by the way - yet they are the high priests of God, a sign that there was worldliness within their lives. They are described as sons of Belial, they had walked after the devil's way rather than God's way. They were apostate priests before God - still giving offerings to God. As you go on within this little book you find that the Ark of the Covenant was not in the tabernacle, where it ought to have been. You find that the children of Israel were dabbling in idolatry, you find that the judges - who were given the rule by God to govern the people of Israel - were dishonest in all they did before God. And we read, at the end of 2 Samuel, that it was through the influence of two godly men that the judgement and the wrath of God was reversed from His people.

Who were they? Samuel and King David. The irony of the fact is this: that this man Samuel came out of the barrenness, he was God's man to come out of the barrenness of this woman's womb - to reflect the barrenness of the children of Israel - to deliver them back to their God! If you look at verse 2 and verse 6, you see that Hannah's womb was barren - and it is so distressing, in the day and age in which we live with all our technology and scientific ability, to view a woman whose heart is broken because she cannot bear a child. Indeed, this was probably the reason why Elkanah had two wives - because Hannah, his first wife, couldn't bear, so he had to have another wife to make sure that he raised up children to himself - and as we looked at that barrenness of this woman's womb, it speaks of unfruitfulness. And there is a cycle of agony when there is barrenness in the life, whether it be literal, physical or spiritual barrenness in the soul of any person, there is a cycle of unfruitfulness that goes to dissatisfaction and then revolves to stagnation. When you do not bear fruit you become dissatisfied with your life, and when you become dissatisfied that vicious circle turns round to stagnation, and life begins to sap out of you into death.

It's interesting to see that the word 'Elkanah', his name, means 'God has created'. Imagine that! To be the wife of a man whose name means 'God has created' and he cannot bear children for you, he cannot raise children up to you! And although the barrenness was in the womb of Hannah - can you imagine the laughing stock this man must have been? 'God has created' and she cannot bear him a child! And in Palestine, if you think it's bad now to not be able to bear a child, it was ten times worse - it was a sign of shame and disgrace upon a man and a woman if they did not raise up children unto their name. It's a bit like Abraham, isn't it? His name was 'Abram', 'Father' - that's what it means - then God came along and gave him all the promises: that he would be a father of many; and as the sand is on the shore so would his sons and daughters be; and as the stars in the sky, God would raise up nations of the world from Abraham. And He changed his name to Abraham, which means 'Father of many' - and he is 99, and Sarah's not far behind - and God is still giving the promise, and Abraham is trying his best to hold onto the promise, what a laugh it must have been for all the folk around! But God did the thing that was impossible.

My friends today, do you know barrenness? Maybe it is physical barrenness, maybe it's a medical problem that you have in your life, an illness or a disease, and you feel that it is sapping all the life out of you, you feel unfruitful, dissatisfied, stagnant in your very soul. Perhaps it's an emotional thing, you feel a lack of love in your life from family or from friends, or an absence of a partner that you loved long ago, or that you would long to have - and God seems never to have filled that gap. Perhaps it's a mental barrenness, depression, anxiety, a feeling of inadequacy. Or maybe it is a spiritual barrenness! That the fruit of the Spirit are sadly absent from your life and your walk before God. Whatever that barrenness is, it causes agony within the soul - and it doesn't matter how many 'Job's comforters' come along - you look at her husband in verse 8, he said to her: 'Am not I better to thee than ten sons? Sure, look at the love that I have for you' - and

it doesn't matter, you know what I'm talking about, how many people come along and try to console you, when there is unfruitfulness in your life and a barrenness of some kind - no words will solve that!

I think, perhaps, one of the most confusing things about this passage of Scripture is found in verse 5 - at the end of the little verse it says this: 'the Lord had shut up her womb'. Now that is not a mis-translation, the Lord had shut up her womb! And you look at this from a human perspective, and you think this woman - this poor woman - is breaking her heart, her heart is a heart in pieces because of her barrenness - and it is God has caused it! Why would God do such a thing? Maybe you're asking that question in your own life, and within the word of God we have the benefit of scriptural hindsight, where we can look back at the whole situation and see what came from this woman's barrenness - we don't have that gift, perhaps until we get to glory and we realise why God put us through what we have gone through in our lives. To put it simply, I believe that the reason why God made her barren was to bring her near to Him. To bring her near to Him - and just as the torch burns most brightly when you swing it to and fro, and the juniper plant smells sweetest when you fling it into the fire and let it burn, the bruised and broken heart before God is often the thing that emits the sweetest fragrance in His nostrils! It doesn't seem it at the time, but like M'Cheyne put it: once in his life God put him on his back [so] that he would look up.

If you look at the barren women within the Bible, you see a very interesting study. You find it first of all in the person of Sarah, and Sarah was barren before her husband - she could not bear; and then you find Rachel; and then you find Manoah's wife who gave birth to Samson; you then find Ruth who was barren; and then in the New Testament, Elizabeth and even the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, although she was not barren, she was a virgin, she did not know a man. And these women were in an impossible, a naturally impossible situation - they could not get out of their predicament by the arm of the flesh. But the amazing thing, as you study these barren women within the Bible, is this: that the greatest men of all history came from their womb! From Sarah it was Isaac, from Rachel it was Joseph, from Manoah's wife it was Samson, from Ruth it was Obed, the grandfather of King David, from Elizabeth it was John the Baptist! And I want you to picture the home, for a minute, of Leah and Rachel and Jacob - and we're looking now at a passage that you find in Genesis chapter 30 - and Rachel has been mocked by her neighbours and her friends, she has the reproach upon her of a barren womb. And I want you to see her, perhaps coming into Jacob's tent, and her eyes are red and sore, her hair is dishevelled, her voice is hoarse with groaning before God - and she comes before Jacob, frustrated, humiliated, despairing and she cries a piercing cry: 'Jacob, give me children or I die!'. And that cry tears the heart of Jacob as a sword would tear his flesh.

What a cry of barrenness - and one of the reasons why it was aggravated was because of adversity. In verse 6 and 7 you find that: that the other wife of Elkanah had provoked her, that's what it literally means - in fact it literally is translated from the Hebrew 'thundered against her'. She was thundering accusations and abuse at her because she could not bear children - it's the same word found in chapter 2 and verse 10 speaking of the judgement of Almighty God. She was throwing all the adversity! Sometimes our homes can be like that, can't they? This was a godly home, they were going up to the city, to Shiloh, to worship God in the feasts that perhaps they did many times in the year. It was a godly home, they recognised God in their life - the very name of Elkanah speaks of that, and Hannah's name speaks of the grace of God. Yet in all its godliness it was a divided home!

There was adversity in the home - and some of us know that, some of us know adversity in work and within the church. We hear comments to our hearts, insinuations that are made, we have to face day by day temptations and sins that so easily beset us, and we can become barren, we can become stagnant because of the adversity that we face as believers from day-to-day in our lives. And of course the greatest adversity we all face is the adversary himself, going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. The Psalmist says in Psalm 74 verse 10: 'Oh Lord, oh God, how long shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?'. Maybe you're here today and, like many of us, you're asking that question:

'How long is this going to go on, God? This barrenness, this anxiousness, this agony and anxiety within my soul - this circumstance that I am in, when am I going to come out of it?' - and you feel like that woman with the unjust judge. You remember the Lord spoke of it in Luke's gospel chapter 18, and it speaks of an unjust judge who never feared God nor men, so he wasn't going to fear a little woman with a little problem, as far as he was concerned. But the word of God tells us that that little woman came and came, again and again, saying: 'Avenge me of my adversary'. The unjust judge got so fed up that he said: 'I will avenge her, lest with her constant coming she weary me', and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself went on to conclude and to sum it up by saying: 'Shall not the God of all the earth avenge his own elect, that cry unto him day and night?'.

Oh, my friend, we have an adversary and we have adversity in our lives - but do you see this? That this little woman, Hannah, was not like Naomi, whose name means 'Mara' and 'bitterness'. Remember Naomi went out to the people, when she came home to her home town, and she said this: 'I went out full and I came back empty' - she was full of bitterness because, as far as she was concerned, God had done an awful thing in her life! Hannah didn't do that, Hannah went to God for a son - she was barren, a heart that was in pieces. But I want you to see this: that she had a heart that was in prayer. Look at verse 13: 'Hannah spake in her heart'. Is it any wonder that Samuel became such a man of prayer? You see, Hannah's reaction wasn't like the other barren women in scripture, she didn't turn to her husband and castigate him because he couldn't raise up a seed onto her, nor did she get the other wife and ask her husband to sleep with her so that a seed could be raised to her name - but she says this, she can say like Eunice and Lois: 'For this child, I prayed!' Can you say that, mother or father? 'For this child, I prayed'. Is it any wonder that this man Samuel, through a mother's prayers and a father's encouragement, changed a whole nation before God? Because of her prayers in the face of God! One has rightly said: 'Prayer is the gold key that opens the gate of mercy. Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscles of omnipotence' - and prayer was Hannah's answer. And, my friend, prayer is your only answer! It is our only answer! For God, as I said at the beginning, is our only hope! If we do not live for God, and live with God at the forefront and as the sum of all our need, we will be lost!

But she turned to prayer, and what a prayer it was. You see in verse 8 that it was a prayer filled with anger. Elkanah asked her, 'Why is your heart grieved?', and that word 'grieved' is a Hebrew idiom - it really means 'angry'. It's not sadness: 'Hannah, why are you so angry? Why is your heart filled with anger?'. Many have been angry with God, but it is what you do with that anger with God that matters - whether you take it to the highways and the byways, and your relatives and you poison them against God because of your bitterness and your anger before Him, or whether you take your anger to the Lord in prayer and open your heart, and as it says of Hannah: pour out your soul before God! Wasn't it the apostle told us in Ephesians 4: 'Be ye angry and sin not'? Do you know that God wants your anger? God wants you to pour it out before Him, rather than pouring it out before others. He wants you to take your anger and make it into prayer before Him - and it was anger above all things that drove Hannah to her knees, but it also drove her away from worshipping God. We find that she fasted, she didn't eat of the sacrifice, she didn't eat of the offering because she was so concerned with anger that she came before God and nothing mattered until her prayer was answered before Him. Martin Luther said: 'I never work better than when I'm inspired by anger. When I am angry I can write, I can pray and I can preach well - for then my whole temperament is quickened, my understanding sharpened and all mundane vexations and temptations depart' - when he directed his anger, righteous that it may be, before God in prayer.

Secondly, she was broken. In verse 10 we find that she: 'prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore'. God wants your brokenness! The Psalmist says in 34 and 18: 'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit'. And her tears were the physical evidence that her heart was broken before God, and God was saying to this woman Hannah: 'Look, your tears I am putting in a bottle'. Oh, there are many tears shed in quiet, dark, secret places - but, my friend, do you see that your tears, as Spurgeon said, are 'liquid prayers'? Do you see that God is washing your eyes with your tears that you might see His way in your life and that you might be drawn closely to Him? This woman was angry, and we can be angry;

she was broken, and we can be broken - but I want you to see that her prayer cost her. Verse 22, she gave up the very thing that she was asking for - she was asking for a son but before she even received the son, she had given the son over to the Lord. Like David, he said: 'Neither will I offer burnt offerings onto the Lord God of that which doth cost me nothing'. One of the reasons why we don't get, often, the answers to our prayers is what James says in chapter 4 and verse 3, that we ask amiss that we may consume it upon our lust. But this woman Hannah didn't do that, she said: 'Give me a son and if You give me a son I'll give that son back to You'. She didn't say, 'I'm going to keep him, and he's going to look after me and he's going to work and get a great career and bring all the money in. I'm going to have him!' - her prayer cost her!

I read this week about a man called Dan Crawford, a lad of only nineteen years of age, and he was standing at the train station in Glasgow about to leave for the mission field in Africa. And there was a little company that met there to bid him farewell, and his mother was standing there and her friend walked over and whispered in her ear a little word of comfort - and that godly mother turned round to her and said this: 'He spared not His own Son'. It was 22 years later that she saw her son again. He buried his own son on the mission field and died at the age of 56 - and her prayers, probably for that son that he might glorify God, ended up in costing her the very thing that she asked. And Hannah came to God and said, 'I am Your maidservant', she was humble in the sight of God's sovereignty, and she said to God, 'Lord remember me' - and it says that God showed grace onto Hannah, and her very name means that. And it didn't cost her a moment of crisis in a meeting, it didn't cost her the best years of her life - but she said that she would give that child to God all the days of his life and a razor would not touch his head. The law of the Nazarite was only for a period of time in a young man's life - but this young man Samuel would be dedicated all - all - of his life.

Her prayer was angry and broken and costly - but fourthly: it was spiritual. In verse 12 and 13 we find that Eli ran in and, because she was praying from her heart - and in Palestine at this time public prayer was always audible, you never prayed in your heart in public, but she was down and her mouth was moving and there was nothing coming [out] - and she was praying spiritually before God. She was pouring out her soul - do you know what that is? Oh, look at all the burdens we have, we couldn't even number them perhaps in this place today. If we mounted them all up and used them as a list of prayer, we would be here till the cows come home, for all the needs that there are. But can I ask you: do you take your needs and pour them out to God? It's wonderful that even when we can't find the words to say, like Hannah, that in our very souls we have an advocate - the Holy Spirit is within us and when there are groanings that cannot be uttered He can translate those to God. And it's not just that, as Romans 8 says, but we have an advocate within our souls to translate the things that we can't even put into words to the Lord Jesus Christ - and the Lord Jesus Christ, our mediator and our advocate before God, takes those groanings that the Holy Spirit has sent to Him and He interprets them in a way that is blameless and acceptable before our Heavenly Father.

Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh what pain we needless bear when we do not carry everything to God in prayer - and there she was, spiritual praying. But fifthly, she was misunderstood - he thought she was drunk! And I believe in the age in which we live that when we do right things, even among the church of Jesus Christ, we are misunderstood, we're seen as eccentric, we're seen as extremists and fanatics. The amazing thing was that Eli charged her, theoretically, with being a daughter of Belial, when his own sons were sons of Belial. Never make that mistake - being a person whose own children are not born-again, yet you criticise those that are. But my friend, can you see it? Can you see how she was misunderstood? How she was spiritual in her prayers? How it cost her everything? How she was broken? How she was angry? But at the end of it all - when you look at all this pain and agony that is being poured out before God - she was answered! Her heart was at rest after prayer. Verse 27: 'For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him'. Verse 18: 'So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad' - God had answered her prayer, God was faithful to His promise, and He is faithful to His

promise today as He was in Hannah's day - and the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man still avails much!

The little child was called Samuel - Shemuel - 'the name of God'. But if you were whispering it, or shouting it, do you know it sounded like? Not Shemuel, but 'Shem-a-uel' which means this: God heard! Do you know that God can hear you? The hymnwriter in this hymn book that we have, in [number] 776, asks this question:

"Unanswered yet, the prayer your lips have pleaded
In agony of heart those many years.
Does faith begin to fail? Is hoping departed?
And think you all in vain those falling tears?
Say not, the Father hath not heard your prayer,
You shall have your desire, sometime, somewhere.

Unanswered yet, faith cannot be unanswered!
His feet are firmly planted on the rock.
Amid the wildest storms she stands undaunted,
Nor quails before the loudest thunder shock.
She knows omnipotence has heard her prayer,
And cries 'It shall be done! Sometime, somewhere'."

Oh, will you not take it to the Lord? Will you not 'believe that ye receive and then ye shall have'? You see, she had a heart of praise, finally, as you see it in verse 1 of chapter 2: 'My heart rejoiceth in the Lord' - and her heart rested, her heart was at peace and the answer to her prayer came before she saw it. I want you to see that - please - she knew God had answered her prayer before she even conceived in her womb. That's why she went away, her countenance was changed and she began to eat - verse 18. Because the Lord Jesus did not say, 'Believe that I shall give you', but, 'Believe that ye have and ye will receive'. Believe that ye have - and maybe there are some folk in here and you haven't learnt the lesson of God's word about praying and it is this - listen, please: are you still asking God for things that He has promised He will give you? You see, when God promises He gives us a thing - we're not meant to go on asking for it, we're meant to begin to praise Him for doing it! And she praised.

And there is among us today, as we close, One who can heal the broken hearted, One who can soothe your sorrows - but you must let Him do it. There was once a poor man standing at the side of the road in all his rags and dirt with a burden upon his back. And a rich man passed him in a golden chariot, and he stopped and he took pity on him, and he brought him on the back and seated him there. And after a while's journey he turned to look at the pilgrim again, and he saw - to his astonishment - that he still had the burden on his back. He said, 'Sir, why have you still that burden on your back when I've given you this lift?'. 'Oh, Sir', he said, 'I am so grateful that you have given me this ride. I would not like to presume upon you to take the load off my back and leave it here in the cart'. 'Oh fool!', he said, 'If I am able to lift you and take you forward, am I not able also to bear your burden?'

Is your heart in pieces? Will you put those pieces into prayer? And God says to you today from the 42nd Psalm: 'My soul, why art thou disquieted within thee? Hope thou in God: for thou shall yet praise him!'. The Lord Jesus says to you: 'Come onto Me and rest'.

Let us bow our heads, perhaps you're in our gathering today and you have never let the Lord Jesus lift your load of sin, you've never been saved. Well, He is here to lift that load now, your load of backsliding - just like the children of Israel - He can lift now and restore unto you the years that the locusts have eaten. And whatever your load is, He may not take it away, but He will lighten that burden and He will go through your

turmoil and your tears with you - knowing that He is bearing the burden for you. Our Father, we pray that Thou wilt give grace, grace to believe the promise is true - that God is faithful and that we have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, but was tested in all points like we are, yet without sin - why? Of course, because He was God, but because He trusted in His Father, and because He prayed and looked to heaven. We pray that we would do such and find the trusting heart to Jesus clinging, and praising God for lifted loads. Part us now with Thy blessing, in Jesus name. Amen.

The Heart Of The Matter - Chapter 3

"The Disorientated Heart"

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Now, looking at this subject 'The Disorientated Heart', we're turning to 2 Samuel chapter 7. We were in 1 Samuel chapter 1 last week, looking at the character of Hannah and her broken heart, and how she broke her heart because she did not have a child. And we saw that that was God's way of bringing Hannah to the throne of grace and answering her prayer and giving her hope and more faith in her God. But we're turning this morning to the second book of Samuel and chapter 7 and we're going to read from verse 1.

"And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies; that the king [David] said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains. And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the Lord is with thee. And it came to pass that night, that the word of the Lord came unto Nathan, saying, Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar? Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel: And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth. Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime, and as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the Lord telleth thee that he will make thee an house. And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David. Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?"

The story of David is a complex and quite a long one, that we find paved across 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel. You'll remember that the story begins where David, the shepherd boy, is out looking after his sheep and Samuel, the prophet of God who we were thinking of his birth last week, comes looking for a new king to be anointed in succession to Saul. Saul had lost his anointing because he had disobeyed God. But here we have the story of David - and you'll remember, Samuel went down all the sons of [Jesse] and could not find the one to anoint. He asked Jesse, 'Have you another son?', and Jesse directed him out to David, looking after the sheep. David was small, David was young, David was a strange one, it was an obscure choice - yet the Spirit

of God was saying to the heart of Samuel: 'This is he, this is Mine anointed, this is the King of all Israel'. He was not the obvious choice, but he was God's choice.

You'll remember from that day - when God took His anointing off Saul and placed it upon the child David - that, from that day on, David received persecution from the hand of Saul. You'll remember how David found grace in the eyes of the Israelites when he defeated the great giant, Goliath. You'll remember that he was the greatest general in all of Saul's armies - and from many of his victories he would come back to Jerusalem and the shout would be: 'Saul has slain his thousands, but David has slain his tens of thousands'. And Saul's indignation boiled in jealousy and in hatred of one, whom half of his heart loved and the other half of his heart hated. Because of that David had to flee from the sight of Saul, and we continue to read the story over and over again until David is placed, eventually, on the throne in Jerusalem - and David becomes king over all Israel. And God gives David victory over all of his enemies - look at chapter 8 of 2 Samuel, you see that, that all the nations that surrounded the borders of Israel and Jerusalem were defeated by the hand of David. God gave him victory, God established his kingdom - and now we see him, and in verse 1 of chapter 7, he is sitting in his house, sitting in the palace, he has rested from all his battles and his labours and he is sitting leisurely, thinking and meditating upon what will be his next act.

This passage of scripture is a famous one within the Old Testament - it is where we find the Davidic covenant, made by God to David, established. And there are over 40 chapters and passages of the Bible related to this one passage of scripture that we have read. There were five covenants made with the people of God, we find in the Bible. First of all there was Noahic covenant in Genesis, made to Noah. Then there was the Abrahamic covenant, then there was the Levitical and priestly covenant, and then we find the Davidic covenant - and the next covenant to come along is in the New Testament, alluded to by Jeremiah: 'I will make a new covenant with you'.

The story that we've read together today is a very complex and misunderstood one. You have David sitting in leisure, sitting resting in his palace from all his labours, with zeal in his heart for God - and he wants to glorify God. He has glorified God through his victories on the battlefield and now he wants to glorify God in a different way and he turns to the prophet Nathan and says: 'I've a desire in my heart to glorify God. I live in a palace made with cedar, but the ark of God is sitting outside in a tent, uncovered by a ceiling of cedar. Why should I live in my house and the ark God be out in the open?'. Nathan tells him: 'You do whatever is in your heart. The desire that you find within your soul, you carry it out' - and we find that Nathan goes away from the presence of David and he goes to the quietness and the stillness of his own home, where God's still small voice can speak to him, and God tells Nathan: 'No! David is not to build the temple. Go back to David and tell him that he is not to build the temple'. David, who had this zeal within his heart to build a house for God, you can imagine how devastated he would have felt for Nathan to come and tell him: 'You're not the man, you're not to do it and it's not to happen now in your day'. But it's interesting, as we read this passage, that God tells David: 'I'm going to do something greater. I'm going to give you promises and blessings, I'm making a covenant with you now that will make your heart jump for joy at the prospect of what is ahead and what I'm going to do through you and your seed'.

So, this is the passage that we have before us - and there four types of heart that I want you to see through this passage. The first is found in verses 1 to 2, and it's the heart of David, it is a zealous heart. Now I want to make this preface to you before we go any further, and it's this, listen: what is intrinsically good, and perceived to be for God's glory, is not necessarily God's will. Let me repeat that: what is intrinsically good, and perceived to be for God's glory, is not necessarily God's will. In verses 1 and 2 we have a zealous heart of David - and this amazes me - David has finished all his labours and his battles, he is sitting in his palace and what is he doing? He is thinking of God! He is thinking of ways and means by which he can glorify God, he can uplift the name of God, he can praise God within the nation and within the world. My own heart is

convicted at that thought, for in my times of leisure, in my times where I leave off from work, often they can be times that are saturated and delved in sin and self. But not David!

David was sitting upon his throne thinking of a zealous desire to glorify God - and you see that the company that David kept within his leisure, he kept the company of God's prophet. Nathan! And we are moulded by my friends - and listen to this, young people! - we will be moulded by the company that we keep. David was moulded by Nathan. And David's ambition, like many commentators would say, is not a selfish ambition, what is in David's heart here is a righteous ambition, it is a pure, holy desire to glorify God by building Him a temple and by putting the ark of the covenant which is the significant presence of God Himself, within that ark, in a beautiful place of worship, a beautiful sanctuary. It was good for David to have that desire within his heart. It wasn't simply to build a name for himself but it was a deep motive of heart, he had a love for God, he had a deep desire to serve and to glorify God. And here David, at 40 years of age, is wanting, and is inspired by the highest emotions possible, to bring a great name to his God.

He had achieved his house of cedar, but now he wanted a temple for God. I do not wish to be critical - for I, like Paul, am the chief of sinners - but let me say this: that so many folk go into the ministry and go into mission work, and they build a house of cedar for themselves but nothing for God. We can do that in our own lives, where we begin to build empires for our name and for our reputation and for ourselves, yet the worship and praise and respect and reverence of God is missing - not David! David, as he sat resting from his labours, decided: 'I will find a way to glorify God'. His heart was full of zeal, he had a zealous heart and one of the reasons was because of earth's blessings that had been given to him. He's sitting in a palace, a beautiful place, he has rested from all his enemies, he has been lavished prosperity and success by the hand of God - but it is amazing to me, as he received all these earthly blessings from God, his success did not spoil his sanctification! His wealth did not spoil his walk with God. The man was right when he said: 'It takes a steady hand to carry a full cup' - and David was endeavouring, successfully, in all his blessing and success and prosperity to see the smile of God still upon him.

So, if this is the case, how did he make a wrong decision? It's very interesting to me that, if you turn to Deuteronomy - turn to Deuteronomy for a moment - Deuteronomy chapter 12. We're often told that there are four ways of knowing the guidance of God in our life, and I would adhere to that. But can I bring a gracious warning to you today? Be careful of simplifying the work of God. It's very easy to put God into some kind of biblical scheme and keep Him there, and not let Him out - be careful! The four things are often said to be: the word of God, the witness of the Spirit within your soul, counsel of other believers and circumstances. But I want you to see today - and these are only my thoughts - that David had all four of these, yet he made a wrong decision. Deuteronomy chapter 12 and verse 10 and 11: 'But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the Lord your God giveth you to inherit, and when he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the Lord' - scripture, and I believe perhaps that David had this scripture in mind, as he was sitting resting, meditating upon the word of God. 'God has said, once we cross Jordan into the promised land, once we've defeated all our enemies, He has promised that He will make a place for His name to dwell' - the word of God.

If you turn to 1 Chronicles 16, you don't need to do it now, but you find within 1 Chronicles 16 that the circumstances seem to point to this thing. David had appointed certain ministers to minister before the ark of God in offerings and various things - and the temple service that you find, right up to the time of the Lord Jesus, and indeed after Lord Jesus until the destruction of Herod's temple in 70AD, that service that went on and on and on by the priests was established by David. He had already established it, he was waiting for a

place to be where the name of God would be, and he was actively creating the circumstances around him to facilitate that goal and that zeal.

It's amazing, isn't it? There were 24,000 Levites around the home of David; there were 4,000 musicians; 4,000 on guard at the ark of the covenant - many of them needed housing, many of them needed a building to work in and to carry out their sacrifices - and David probably, looking at the word of God, looking at the circumstances around him of the need that there was, said to himself: 'It must be time for God to create a house for Himself!'. Scripture, circumstances, and there was the witness in his own heart. He had a zeal in his own heart, a desire to see God dwell in a permanent house and not in a tent. Interesting, isn't it? It was not only because of earth's blessings, but it was for heaven's glory - God didn't have a house and I have a house! As Mr Pink says: 'Thousands of professing Christians think more about the welfare of their pet dogs than they do in seeing the need, and spend more time in the upkeep of their motor cars than they do in support of the work of the Lord' - but not David! David had a zealous heart, a heart for God's glory!

Now look, we have a handy knack of criticising believers in scripture for their failures - but I want you to see that we have nothing to criticise David for here today. He had a zealous heart, but look at this secondly: he had a misguided heart. Verse 3, because Nathan, who was meant to guide him in the right direction, I believe did so in a certain way, but failed in another way. Nathan said to the king: 'Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the Lord is with thee'. Now this story is mirrored and echoed in 2 Chronicles chapter 6 on, and in verse 8 of that chapter you find that God said this to David: 'Thou didst well in that it was in thine heart' - do you see this? David wants to build a temple, Nathan tells him: 'You go and do all that's in your heart' - and God, later on down the line, says: 'What was in your heart was good, David!'. So what was wrong? To put it mildly, we studied the heart and saw that it is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked - who can know it? This thing was good, this thing was to the glory of God, this thing seemed to be a need of the day - but this thing, at this moment in time was not the will of God in His divine counsels. David had a heart after good at this moment, but he didn't have a heart after God.

He had the noble guidance of Nathan, 'You go and do what's in your heart'. But the tragedy is that neither Nathan - it's not recorded here - neither Nathan nor David consulted God. It's a tragedy for me to think that I could be running hither and thither, doing good for the Lord, without consulting God about what is His will. Now what Nathan did that was right in this verse was: he didn't discourage David, he encouraged him to do what was in his heart, because it was good within his heart. But at that moment in time, for him to build the temple was not God's will. My friends, can I encourage you today - that we run to one and another to get guidance, to get counsel, and that is good for in the multitude of counsellors there is wisdom - but let us go to God! For if we fail to go to God, we run the risk of doing what is good and not doing what is God's. They failed to consult the noble Guide - and the noble guide of our hearts is God! And in the heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, the only compass that puts us in the right direction is the Spirit of the living God!

When Nathan got into his quiet little home, sat down in the presence of God, and listened for the still small voice of God, he heard God say: 'Go tell My servant, Thus saith the Lord: thou shalt not build Me a house to dwell in'. He had a zealous heart, he had a misguided heart - but thirdly: he had a redirected heart. In verses 4 to 7, look at it, God said to him two things, He asked him two questions. First of all: 'David, are you the one to build that house?' - secondly He asked the question: 'Why have I never asked another leader in Israel to build a house, if I wanted a house?'. Now to put it down to our level, what God was saying to David was two things: 'Not you!' and 'Not now!'. 'Nathan, go and tell David it's not going to be him, and it's not going to be now at all' - and this must be the hardest thing, I imagine, to hear from the lips of Almighty God, where God says to a heart that is full of zeal, full of enthusiasm, full of a desire for the glory of God: 'No! It's not you and it's not now!'.

How hard it must be to hear the words, 'Not you', when you've had a vision of what you want to do for God. You've dreamed dreams about what God, you feel, wants to do for you - I've watched in amazement at the Olympic Games this week, especially the rowing the other evening, Friday evening. And there was the coxless pairs men's race, and the two of them - as far as they were concerned - had it in the bag, and when they got there at the end of the race and they came fourth, and they expected to come first - they stood before the cameras in tears, not knowing what to say! Because the message was: 'Not you!'. It's a hard message to take, it's the message that John the Baptist had to imbibe in his soul when he said these words: 'He', Jesus Christ, the one I am preparing the way for, the one I am making the path straight for, 'He must increase and I must decrease'.

I wonder what I would do if God said to me: 'David, your ministry is going to go down. It's going to start off well but it's going to continue to depreciate in the eyes of men - and there's going to be another's going to come along and take your place' - and if that was God's will for me, I have to wonder: could I accept that? John the Baptist accepted it: 'He must increase and I must decrease'. It's an awful thing to turn from 'I am the one' to 'I am not the one'. God would say to all of our hearts today: 'Thinkest thou great things of thyself? Think them not'. I read a wonderful story this week about a man called Charles Simeon, he was a great preacher in King's College, in Holy Trinity in Cambridge. As Hugh Evans Hopkins, his biographer, tells us - listen to this: 'When, in 1808, Simeon's health broke down and he had to spend some 8 months recuperating on the Isle of Wight, it fell to his curate, Thomason, to step into the gap and preach as many as five times on a Sunday. He surprised himself and everyone else by developing a preaching ability almost equal to his minister, at which Simeon - totally free from any suggestion of professional jealousy - gently rejoiced. He quoted the scripture: 'He must increase but I must decrease', and he told a friend, 'Now I see why I have been laid aside, I bless God for it'.

How do we react when God says 'No'? Maybe you're in illness today and you feel God's saying, 'No'. Maybe you're bereaved and God just doesn't seem to take it away. Maybe there's problems in the home and God seems to be saying, for this moment of time, 'The answer is no'. Maybe you're left on your own and you would long for a partner in life and - as far as you can see, through scripture and circumstances and the witness of what is happening around you - God seems to be saying 'No' to your heart. It's hard to take that 'No'! It's hard to take it when it's 'No' and it's 'Not now' - for we of all creatures are the most impatient, aren't we? We want everything now, on the plate while we wait, and the hardest thing to do is to wait on God when God says 'Wait', because it means we can't do anything. We can't pray to bring something, we can't work to bring the thing, because God has told us just to wait on Him, to be still and to know that He is God.

But this is the wonderful thing I want you to see today: that David's disappointment was His appointment. David's disappointment was God's great appointment. David wanted to build a human temple for God, and God was saying to the heart of David, 'No! You're not going to build Me a house, I'm going to build you a house!'. Do you get it? What do we do when God says 'No'? Do we sulk? Do we despair? Do we doubt? Do we turn our back on God? Do we run headlong into the world again? What do we do? For everything depends on our reaction to God when God says 'No', even when the zeal is in our hearts. How did David react? Now look at this: God told him 'No' - and I think this is beautiful, for if you look down this passage you will not find one negative in the answer of God, He said 'No' in Chronicles, but not in this passage, because God was trying to ease His servant down in his zeal. He didn't want to let him crash, and all his views and visions be shattered in a moment - but He cushions His word in promises, in assurance of His grace and of His love.

Look at it: what did David do? It says that he went, verse 18, in before the Lord and sat down in his tent - you see, God reminded him of where he'd come from, God reminded him: 'You were in the sheepcote and I brought you out, and I anointed you, and I brought you from bad things to great things'. And God would remind us today: 'Do you remember where you came from? Do you remember your sin and your iniquity

before Me? Do you remember where I brought you from and the heights that I brought you to? Do you remember all the blessings that I have blessed you [with] in the past? Well listen, if I've blessed you like that in the past, even though I am saying 'No' to you today, I want to reassure your heart that I've something greater for you!'. Do you believe that? Do you believe what we've been studying in months gone by, in Habakkuk? 'I will show you a work, I work that I am working in your day, that if you saw it, you wouldn't believe it!'. Do you believe what we studied in Ephesians 3:20 - that God is able to do exceeding, abundantly more than we ask or think? And what David was thinking, probably, in his mind is this: 'I'm going to die and this temple - I'll never see the temple!'. Maybe you're here today and you're thinking, 'Will I die and never see my son saved, my daughter come to Christ?' - my friend, what does it matter, if God does it?

And do you know what David's answer was, and his reaction? We read in 1 Chronicles 29 and verses 2 and 3, that from that moment on he began with all his might to gather together materials for the temple. God told him, 'No, you can't do it'. So he said, 'Well, who's going to do it?', and God said, 'Your son', so he says, 'Well, I'll help him with all my might'. That's some spirit, isn't it? I'm led to believe that there is a chapel in Paris and it is dreary, it is drab, it is downcast on the outside, it is absolutely filthy to look upon - and if you didn't realise what was inside it you would never go into it. It's called the Chapel of the Saints - but if you walk into that chapel in all its blackness and darkness, and turn in a certain direction to the stained-glass window, you see the greatest stained-glass window in the world - the famous 'Rose Window'. Isn't it wonderful? Because, as you stand with your back to the light outside, you cannot see any beauty in it - but when you are brought into the sanctuary of that place, and the light shines in front of you and through that window, you can see one of the [most] beautiful creations that man has ever created - and it is the same with God, my friend! Listen: David didn't know why God said 'No' - and maybe you don't! - but several years later God brought David in and told him why. 'You were to fight for Me David, but your son will build for Me. You have blood on your hands but this temple is to be a place of peace and rest, so you can't build it'. And David took the word of God - and let me reassure you today: there will come a day, whether you're here on earth at the time or whether you're gone into glory, when it'll all be made plain.

I heard a lovely story, and I finish with this, of E. M. Bounds that I've been encouraging you to read his book, 'Power Through Prayer'. E.M. Bounds had two sons, one of his sons was a believer and the other was not. E. M. Bounds died at the age of 90 - and his son that was not saved, lived to the age of 90 and didn't get saved until he was 90! But Bounds had prayed, God had promised and God provided. My friend, whether it come in your lifetime or not, God knows the desire that is in your heart and He will give it.

Let us pray. It is my understanding of scripture that it will be, on that great day, David who will be credited for the building of the temple - because of the zeal that was in his heart. Even though it was denied him, God will bless him for it - and God says to us today, if we have a zeal after Him, He says: 'I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'. If we put our hand in His hand, no matter what 'No's' we may hear from Him, we can know that we are safe in His will.

Our Father, we thank Thee that You reassured David's heart. You told him, 'I have blessed you, I will bless you and in My time, and My way, I will do a thing that you couldn't even imagine'. We haven't had time to even study it, Lord, but we know that that meant the Lord Jesus Christ - that David's throne would be established forever and he couldn't even have imagined what God was going to do through this Son that would sit on his throne one day. And Lord, we look for that day when He will take His throne, and He will reign supreme. But we pray, until He comes, that He may reign supreme in our lives and we would do not what is good, but what is God's. To His glory we pray, Amen.

The Heart Of The Matter - Chapter 4

"The Lonely Heart"

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We've been looking at a series on the heart within the word of God, how we understand the Biblical term 'the heart'. We've looked at many understandings of the heart, last week we looked at the disorientated heart in the character of David, and today we're going to look, in John chapter 14, at the lonely heart. The heart that feels lonely.

The gospel of John and chapter 14 is the passage of the word of God that we will read together today. John's gospel and chapter 14 - very well known words, but words that continue to thrill our soul and our heart, in the comfort that the Lord brings. Verse 1: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me", verse 16, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also", verse 25, "These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid".

Let's bow in a moment's prayer: Our Father, we thank Thee for the words of God. We thank Thee that we can be assured that these are Thine own breathed words. Every word upon this page, we know is straight from Thy heart. And Lord, as such, we pray that we would be in a fit state to receive it. We pray that those who really need, at this time, to hear the message from God, that their heart would be prepared and good ground for the seed that goes forth. Help me by Thy Holy Spirit, that advocate divine, and give us a portion of Him to satisfy our need. For we ask in Jesus name, Amen.

'The Lonely Heart' of the child of God. Loneliness is a great problem within many of our lives. Chuck Swindoll, in one of his books, tells that when he was in the Marine Corps, he one time went to sea for 17 days. On about the 10th day of their voyage, they had removed from the body of any land in the whole of the Pacific Ocean - and the sea, the great ocean, began to swell, sometimes to 30 or 40 feet at a time. And he accounts that the ship that looked enormous in that little dock, as they boarded it to go to sea, now looked like a little tooth pick floating in the middle of the circle of that great horizon. As he stood there in the middle of that ocean, looking at great tidal waves all around him, feeling like a drop in the ocean, he says that he remembered Samuel Taylor Coleridge's words in his poem: 'The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner' - and this verse came to his mind:

'Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea.
Not a saint took pity on my soul
In agony'.

Someone has said that loneliness is one of the most universal sources of human suffering that there is. For millions in our world today it is almost a permanent condition. It is no respecter of persons. No matter what class you're from, what colour or creed, how much money you have, or your age - it doesn't matter, we all can experience the suffering of loneliness. It hits everyone at some time within their life, and for a sad few people it hits them all of their life. It is a painful awareness, to realise that you're alone, to realise that in your life there is a lack of meaningful contact with other human beings. Neill Straight (sp?) said that loneliness is spending your days alone with your thoughts, your discouragements, and having no one to share them with. Many feel empty, they feel the sadness of their loneliness, they feel discouragement, isolation - and perhaps the greatest anxiety of all is the desire to be wanted and to feel needed, but that no longer seems to be there. For many, they feel left out, they feel rejected - and even when surrounded by many folk within family, or friends, or even within the assembly of the church of Jesus Christ, they can feel unwanted at times - and there comes, within their very soul and being, this feeling of hopelessness that drives them to find companionship of any kind.

It is terrible to experience the feeling of worthlessness. And often loneliness leads to worthlessness - there often is, within the mind and the heart of a lonely person, the conviction that since no one wants to be with me, perhaps I'm not the kind of person anyone would want. In the world around we see many lonely people going to pubs and to clubs - and it's the same scenario, believe it or not, within the church of Jesus Christ, for among us are many lonely people, some of them just seeking companionship and friendship - coming among where there are people. The Christian psychologist, Craig Ellison (sp?), says that there are three kinds of loneliness: first of all there is emotional loneliness. That is a lack, or a loss, of psychological, intimate relationship with another human being on an intimate level. Secondly there is social loneliness: a feeling of aimlessness, anxiety, of being 'out of it', of being on the margins of social life - and the need for a person like that, is to be found within a group that loves them for who they are and meets their needs deep in their soul. Thirdly, he says that there is spiritual loneliness: that is to be separate from God. No meaning in life, no purpose - and what a person like that needs is Christ. They need an intimate, personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and they need to be baptised into His body, into the Christian community.

Now I'm not talking about solitude. For solitude is something that is voluntarily - where we withdraw from the crowd at times, and it can be very refreshing, it can be very helpful. But I'm talking about loneliness, something that is involuntary, something that comes upon people - they do not choose it - and it brings great pain, great frustration and great distress. We can look around the world that we live in and ask: 'What is the cause for such loneliness in the age in which we live?'. Some would say it is technology - how you no longer visit a person, you lift the phone and talk to them. Some say it's mobility - the fact that we can drive, one person in one car to our work, and not have to interact with anyone else until we come home. Some say it's a lack of neighbourliness - and some of you can remember days gone by [when] you used to fall in and out of other neighbours homes like your own home, and there was that camaraderie, that neighbourliness, that seemed to protect against loneliness. Whether it be low self-esteem, an inability to connect - the effects of loneliness are isolation, poor self-esteem, discouragement, self-centredness, the 'poor little me' syndrome, and at times - at its very worst - a hopelessness and a despair that leads many, even in the church of Jesus Christ, to alcoholism, to suicide and to domestic violence.

In John chapter 14, believe it or not, the disciples are in quite a similar situation. And I want you to put yourself in their situation for a moment, and think of the words that they had been hearing, very distressing words from the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ. What did He said to them? 'One of you shall betray Me...what thou doest, do quickly...whither I go, you cannot follow me...I go to prepare a place for you...yet a little while and you will see Me no more', and for them the light that was the Messiah of God, the hope that was their Redeemer, their Saviour and their Deliverer - as far as they could see, that light was about to go out. The supporting presence of who He was, of what had drawn them away from their business, their

occupation, some of them their families and their friends - that supporting presence was going to go from under them and they would be left all alone.

The surprising thing about it is this: that He said to them, 'It is expedient for Me to go...I tell you the truth, it is necessary for Me to go from you'. And I'm sure the disciples were thinking in their mind, 'It's not necessary! It is necessary that You stay with us! If You go, we could be slain as sheep. If You go, we will be persecuted by the Romans and the Jews. If You go, we will be like a huddle of frightened children in an upper room, behind shut doors and windows, fearing for our lives! It is not necessary! It is not expedient that You go!'. But of course, the Lord Jesus always knows best - but it doesn't always make sense to us, does it? As far as they were concerned it was not expedient that He go, in their mind it was like the mother seeing her death as being beneficial to her own children's interest - it just does not make sense. And my friend, I am conscious that there are many in this place today and you have experienced loneliness in a similar way to the disciples. Someone, or something, that you held so dear in your heart has been taken from you and it doesn't seem right! It does not seem expedient - and you have been left with a void, left with a loneliness and an emptiness that, it seems, nothing can fill - not even God!

And as they thought of their Lord's departure, the icy hand of despair gripped their lonely hearts. They wondered, 'What will fill our emptiness? What will come and take the place and the space that this man, the Lord Jesus Christ, has left? Is there anything?' - and they faced, as a group of twelve, the orphans prospect of loneliness and emptiness. The first question I want to ask you is: do you feel like an orphan? Do you feel like an orphan? The Bible, you know, is full of emptiness, full of loneliness - it describes Adam in a perfect creation, and God saw everything and said it was good. Yet in Genesis chapter 2 and verse 18 He said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone', because God knew - and I want to say this within the context of church, and of service within church - that the companionship of God for we, as human beings as we are, is not enough! God recognised that it was not enough, that is why He made a help-meet for the man in the person of woman. But the problem was the fall, as the problem always is the fall, and sin broke the relationship and loneliness was possible now within the relationship between a man and a woman, and man with his fellow-man in friendship.

Go to all the characters that you like within the Bible, you have Jacob, you have Moses, Job, Nehemiah, Elijah, Jeremiah, David - so many Old Testament characters who experienced this awful void and aching pain of loneliness within their heart! I want to be careful in treading on this ground...but within the New Testament, in the garden of Gethsemane, it strikes me that there was an insight of the Lord Jesus Christ into the future loneliness that He would experience in God forsaking Him at the cross. And even there, our Lord Jesus Christ had those aching pains of loneliness! John the apostle, we read of him - as far as we can understand - that at the very end of his life, he finished his whole life in a prison on the Isle of Patmos all alone. Paul, in prison also, he said to Timothy, 'They have all left me, many have forsaken me. Please come to me and don't tarry! Make every effort to come and come soon!'.

Have you experienced the orphanhood of loneliness? Look at verse 18 with me of this wonderful chapter of Scripture - and these are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: 'I will not leave you orphaned', and that is the word, 'orphaned'. But we can feel like orphans, can't we? What is an orphan? An orphan is a person, possibly, that at some time in their life has known a father and a mother, a sweet home of love and friendship together - but they have lost that love, they have experienced having it and now it is gone, and they are experiencing the feeling of abandonment and desolation that orphanhood brings. The poet, Natalie Ray (sp?), put it very succinctly from her heart - it doesn't matter whether it be the death of a husband or a wife, it doesn't matter whether it be the orphanhood of divorce, separation, a prodigal child that has run from home in distress - she put it in her poem:

'No lover makes my kiss his daily quest.
 No hand across the table reaches mine.
 No precious baby nestles at my breast.
 No one to need my love.

Where is the sign that God my Father loves me?
 Surely He created this wealth of love to overflow.
 How can it be that none who wanted me
 Has become mine? Why did I tell them 'No'?

But do they really matter, all the 'whys'?
 Could all the answers take away my pain?
 Or all the reasons dry my eyes,
 Though from heaven's court? No! I would weep again!

My God, You have saved me from hell's black abyss,
 Oh, save me from the tyranny of bitterness!"

I wonder how many in our gathering feel like Mary, as she stood in the garden tomb and cried: 'They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid Him!'. If you feel like an orphan you need help - and, my friend, what one of us here today does not need the help of God in our lives? We were not made to walk alone, we were not made to plough a lonely path - we saw it last Lord's Day in the gospel message: that the yoke is always there for his human beings, we were made to live, enjoy God, glorify Him in a relationship with God and we are not to walk alone! Therefore, the word of God to your heart today my friend is: 'I will not leave you an orphan'. We are Christ's brethren, we are the children of God - in John 13 and 33 He describes His disciples, and addresses them as 'little children'. We are not sheep without a shepherd, we are not scattered and left to the mercy of strangers - listen: we are God's people! Do you feel an orphan?

The second question I want to ask you is: do you know the Comforter? Do you know the Comforter? Look at verse 17: 'Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you', verse 16, 'And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter'. [That] Spirit that will be with you, that Comforter that will come to be beside you - isn't it wonderful and amazing to think that Christ has prayed for Him for us! The word of God says that in His lifetime, He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears - and what were they all about? Some of them were for us! Some of them were that we would know the comforting influence of the third Person of the blessed Trinity, the Holy Spirit. It's a joy to stand at Lazarus' tomb and to think of one, dead four days, and to see the Saviour's head lifted high, looking to glory and saying: 'Father I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me, and I know that Thou hearest Me always!'.

If you feel like an orphan today, the Friend of friends has prayed for you - and never you forget that nothing can interfere with your communion with heaven. Yes, you may be shut off from others because of your predicament - but nothing is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus! And because of that He prayed that we would have another Comforter, verse 16: 'I pray the Father...he shall give you another Comforter'. Their comforter had gone! The one they had invested all their hopes in had gone! But He had promised them, 'I am going but I will not leave you comfortless, I will not leave you as an orphan. I will send to you another comforter'. The Greek word for 'comforter' that you find within the New Testament is the Greek word 'parakletos' - do you know what it literally means? Listen: 'called alongside to help'. Called alongside to help!

Now the English word, that the AV translators have translated that word by, is the word 'comforter' in its old English meaning. And in its old English meaning it's a good equivalent, because it's made up of two Latin words; the word 'com' and the word 'fortis' (sp?) - the word 'com' meaning 'to be in company with', and the word 'fortis' meaning 'to strengthen'. Exactly the same meaning! But that meaning, 'comfort', has changed from the fourteenth century meaning of it right to now, and we think of comfort as being consoled in sorrow, and being consoled in our distress. But in this day and age, when the authorised version was translated, it meant 'to strengthen through comfort', to encourage, to come alongside, and to lift up and to strengthen with the strength of God. We can see that because Wycliffe translated Philippians 4 and verse 13 like this: 'I can do all things through Christ who comforts me' - do you see the meaning? Comfort and strength. Christ says, 'I am going away and, as far as you're concerned, My strength will be deprived of you - but I will send another Comforter' - and that word 'another' simply means this: 'another of the same kind'.

The word 'comforter' is the same word translated in 1 John 2 and verse 1 as 'advocate': 'If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous'. And an advocate is a barrister, and those who are in legal difficulty, in crisis, need a man of legal aptitude and ability to pull them out of their morass of a hole - and we have one! We have Jesus Christ the righteous, but He said to His disciples: 'I'm going away, I as your advocate will go - but if I go I will send another advocate unto you'. Do you know that there is one Person of the Trinity that has been given for your distress? There's one who has been given by God for all the needs that you have in life, He is the advocate, the one who makes intercession for us with strong groanings, which cannot be uttered within our very selves!

Look at verse 16: 'I pray the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you'. In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit dwelt with them, He came upon Samson, with Samson, He preached through Noah before the flood, and He was with them all. We see it primarily in David, where he cries in his sin, in Psalm 51: 'Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me' - the Spirit was with them, but do you see what He's saying? The blessed Lord Jesus Christ is saying: 'The Spirit was with you, but when I go He will be in you'.

Are you aware of the Friend in the Holy Spirit that you have within you at this moment? Are you living in the conscious reality that there is a Helper, there is an Advocate, there is an Encourager, a Strengtheners, and a Comforter that is with you every moment of the day in the Person of the Holy Ghost of God? Are you recognising that source of power that is within you?

'What, though His footsteps linger no longer?
 Still through His Spirit's presence Jesus is ever near!
 What, though your heart be lonely? What, though your friends be few?
 He will not leave you orphans, Jesus will come to you!'

Though He is gone - and there's many a time I think 'Oh! I wish I'd been there in the gospel scenes! I wish I'd witnessed His miracles and heard His golden words falling from His ruby lips. I wish I could have been there! I wish now, in my problems, in my trials, I could know to be near the physical Christ and what it is for Him to reach out and touch me and make me whole!' - I've finished with that! Do you know why? Because we have something greater - do you believe that? He said, 'When I go you will do greater things, and you will experience greater things' - for, if you imagine it, if you were in the wrong town one day when the Lord Jesus was visiting Capernaum, and you were in Jerusalem, you would be deprived of His glorious presence! If He was with John and James, Peter could not enjoy the comfort of His words or His touch - and all He could do at that moment of time, in the will of God, was to affect those disciples from an external way. But He says, 'When I go to be with My Father, that Spirit that was with you will be in you!' - and that means when I'm in distress and you're in distress at the same time, we have a Saviour that is able for both. Isn't that

marvellous? Isn't that wonderful to know the Advocate that we have? We have one like He! And they realised it - remember, they were in their distress, but on the night that He came to them and He breathed on them and said: 'Receive ye the Holy Spirit' - they knew that they were better off!

Do you know that you have another Comforter? Do you know that you have another Comforter, who says: 'I will come to you'? 'I will come to you', look at verse 18: 'I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you'. In another verse, further up the chapter He said: 'I will abide with you forever!'. 'I will come to you' - yes, He came to the disciples, after the resurrection He appeared to them; yes, He came in the Person of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost; yes, He will come again and receive us unto Himself at the second coming of the Lord - but what is being said here is this: 'I will come to you now'!

Some of you need Him to come to you. In the dark and the lonely hours you need Him. When you're in most need of Him, He will come to you. In the storm, when the boat is getting full of the water and almost ready to sink, and you have no hope - He will come to you. When the home is empty that was once filled with that love, and that character, and that voice that you knew so well and filled that home with the love that it [had] - He will come to you! When Jericho has to be attacked on the morrow, when the Jordan must be crossed - He will come to you! When family and friends stand aloof, and when the last coal of life turns to grey, ashen colour - listen: 'I will come to you'.

At times He comes in the quiet of night, He comes and we hear Him not - and He speaks to our souls 'Arise! Arise My love and come away'. Do you know what it is to stand at the tomb of Lazarus and to realise that one is rotting in the grave four days now? And all of a sudden, into the ears of a loved one of Lazarus is whispered this wonderful phrase: 'The Master has come'. My friend, He wants to come to you today, He wants to come to you in comfort - but you're going to have to put yourself on His way. There are certain beaten tracks that you must walk along, that are well worn by the Saviour, you've got to draw near to God and He will draw nigh to you - and you must come across His path! You must meditate and visit Olivet, where He prayed, and you must pray to Him. You must visit Calvary, where He bled. You must visit Joseph's tomb, where He rose from the dead. Gethsemane, where He wept - all these places that were dear to Him, get to them, think upon them and immediately the Spirit of God will unite your heart with His! And the Spirit will whisper into your heart, 'To them that look for Him shall He appear'.

'For warm, sweet, tender even yet,
A present help is He.
And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee.

The healing of His seamless dress
Is by our beds of pain.
We touch him in life's throng and press,
And we are whole again'.

Behold the Bridegroom cometh, will you go out to meet Him? Will you take the path that He is sure to take and touch you? Will you be in the upper room with the rest of the disciples, not like Thomas and miss the Saviour when He comes? My friend, He wants to touch your heart, He has said: 'I will come to you'. Will you recognise that He wants to come to you today in all your distress, in all of your lonely heart, for He is the one who has said: 'Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world'. He is the one who said: 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'!

It is a very hard thing to understand how this man said what I am about to quote, but he did. F.B. Meyer said this concerning this passage: 'Oh, blessed orphanhood, it were well to bereaved to have such comforting'. Let

us realise today, that Christ was forsaken that we might never be. One missionary translator of the Bible was labouring in a tribe in Mexico, and he found it hard to get the specific word for this word 'comforter' within this passage of Scripture. One day his helper came to him asking for a week's leave, and he explained that his uncle had died and he wanted some days off to visit his bereaved aunt - and he said this: 'I want to help her heart around the corner'. That was the word he needed. My friend, is that the word you need? Do you need the Holy Spirit to help your heart around the corner? Well, let your spirit hear Him say today, 'I will not leave you an orphan. I will come to you. Don't be troubled and don't be afraid'.

Let us bow our heads, and I am very conscious that there may be those who are lonely because of that spiritual loneliness that comes in not knowing Christ. The only solution to your problem is being saved by the grace of God - and you must do that if you want the friendship of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are saints in this place whose hearts are breaking more than tongue can tell, cry out to the Saviour now from your heart, that that Comforter may spring up within your soul and carry you, and strengthen you through life's trial. Our Father, we thank Thee that we are not left alone. We thank Thee that Thy Son did not leave us orphans, but sent a Comforter - and through that Comforter, greater things could be done, and a greater experience could be known. And at Pentecost, we remember how He came, and how He took up residence within His church. Lord, let us know and recognise His presence in our lives, the Lord God the Holy Spirit. May He come to us, in Jesus name, Amen.

The Heart Of The Matter - Chapter 5

"The Seeking Heart"

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Now we're turning in our Bibles to Jeremiah, Jeremiah chapter 29. Let me just say that the message I want to bring to you has been burning on my heart in my own personal experience in the last week or so and I hope that I deliver it from my heart, not from notes or not from a sermon as such, but as a message I believe God has been burning on my heart for years now. You've heard it before, but you're going to hear it again because it's there for a reason, because God has put it there - and if I am to be faithful to the capacity I am in here in the Iron Hall, I have to deliver what God puts on my heart. I can't tell Him what I'm going to preach, I have to preach what He burns onto my heart.

Now, if you were at the prayer meeting on Thursday evening - turn to Jeremiah 33 for a moment - our brother Nair from India gave out a prayer letter and at the bottom of it, if you read it, it said that we were to pray that revival would come to India. Well, if you were to read his prayer letter and listen to what he was speaking about, you would nearly think revival had hit India - what he was talking to us about, of how since the last time he visited us about 4 years ago or so, there have been thousands of people converted to Christ. Now that doesn't happen overnight, and it's not going to happen overnight here either - no way. He exhorted us from Jeremiah 33 and verse 3: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not". You remember, he told us that the children of Israel were captives in Babylon - they were downhearted, they were depressed at the prospect of what was happening to them spiritually speaking and as the nation of God - and God's prophet came to them and exhorted them, encouraged them: "Call upon me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, that thou knowest not".

Now, our text this morning fits in very nicely with what our brother brought to us. Jeremiah 29, and we'll read from verse 10 - our text is verse 13, but we'll read from verse 10 to understand the flow of what Jeremiah is saying. Now, first of all, Jeremiah is writing to captives in Babylon - he is writing, so chapter 29 is a letter, it's not a prophecy that he delivered by his mouth, but it's a letter that he wrote because he couldn't get to the people in Babylon. In verse 10 he says this: "For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the Lord: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the Lord; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive".

Let us pray: Our Father, we pray this morning that as we come to Thy word that You would quieten our hearts, still our thoughts - and whatever is being pushed into our mind to distract us from these spiritual nuggets, we ask, in Jesus name, that by Thy Spirit You would banish them - that our minds and our hearts would be a cleared, empty place for the Spirit of God to construct His building in. Lord, we seek Thee, oh God we cry to Thee to come and meet us in this place, to come and meet us face to face, to come and do a spiritual work in some hearts here today - that You will manifest Yourself to them, that You will revive hearts, quicken spirits, breathe by the breath of God, set alight we pray. Oh God, we cry for that power, Lord

God the Holy Ghost, in this accepted hour as on the day of Pentecost, descend in all Thy power. We meet with one accord in our appointed place and await the promise of the Lord, the Spirit of all grace. In Jesus name, Amen.

It is not without significance that the pilgrimage of the heart that we have been going through in recent weeks has brought us, the second time, to the prophet Jeremiah. We looked [at] how the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it? And, ironically, as we come to 'The Seeking Heart' we find that our footsteps bring us again to the prophet of the Lamentations. It is significant that the very presence of the seeking heart within the word of God is found in the weeping prophet. If you turn to Jeremiah chapter 9 for a moment, Jeremiah chapter 9 and verse 1, you find that the lamenting prophet Jeremiah - who wrote the book of Lamentations as well as this prophecy - cries to God from the depths of his soul and says: 'Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!'. In chapter 4 and verse 19, he cries again: 'My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war'.

The weeping heart, the seeking heart, is found in the prophet Jeremiah - for I believe that God's heart is found in the man or the woman who weeps and mourns for their own sin, and for the sin of the nation, and for the sin of the church of Jesus Christ. That is where you find the heart of God! The occasion that we have found our text in, in chapter 29 of Jeremiah - as I've already said, was a letter to the captives in Babylon. And the reason why Jeremiah was writing to them, they were sitting in Babylon dejected, far from home - and you remember how we studied in the books of Haggai and Habakkuk, how they were far away from their temple, the place where they worshipped, the place where they wanted to be. As far as the Psalmist was concerned, it was from the ends of the earth that they were crying unto them - and that is an idiom, a description, of how they were so far from the place where they were to worship God in Jerusalem. Jeremiah can't get to them, so he writes them a letter and the reason why he writes the letter is not unlike the reason why Paul wrote letters in the New Testament. Jeremiah was writing to warn them of false prophets.

False prophets were rising from among them in Judaism and they were standing in Babylon, where the children of God were captives, and they were saying to them - listen: 'Peace, peace, everything is all right. Don't worry, you'll not be here for long, God's going to come in, God is going to deliver you!' - and these false prophets were giving the people of God false hopes. Jeremiah writes to them, and he says: 'You better prepare for a long stay' - in verses 1 to 7 we find he says that: 'Build a house for yourself, plant a vineyard, make sure your garden is pretty because you're going to be in this place of captivity for a very long time'. The prophets say: 'Peace! Peace!', but there is no peace - why? Because God's people hadn't changed their heart! The children of Israel were expecting to be delivered, they were expecting the voice of the false prophet to come true, that they would be free and their God would come and deliver them - yet they were not prepared to change their heart and change their ways! And Jeremiah tells them: 'Settle down, get ready, for God has brought you into this place. God has delivered you into the hand of the Babylonians. Well might you sit down by the rivers of Babylon and weep and cry as you remember Zion - but God has brought you here!'.

My friend, those must have been shattering words for the children of God. 'God has brought you, and He's going to leave you here for 70 years, He's going to knock the sin out of you! And then He will deliver you again'. The Psalmist says in Psalm 139: 'How precious are thy thoughts toward us, O God!' - and we find that almost mirrored in these verses that we've read together already. Verse 11: 'I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you'. God had good thoughts! God didn't want them in Babylon - although God had led them into Babylon because of their sin - but God led them there to discipline them.

In the older generation I hear, almost echoed, the words of the children of Israel in Babylon: 'By the rivers of Babylon, where we sat down, there we wept as we remembered Zion' - 'I remember years ago. I remember the blessings that God brought down upon His people. I remember when there were many souls converted to Christ'. Some of you maybe can remember the days of W.P. Nicholson, where revival hit this part of East Belfast and further afield. We read books about 1859, we read books about Crusades that went across America, we read about Charles Finney - the greatest revivalist in all America, D.L. Moody, R.A. Torrey - and we look back and we say: 'We wept!', as we remember. But the glory has departed and 'Ichabod' can be written over our spiritual experience - and I believe that we are in the Laodicean age spiritually speaking. In chapter 3 of Revelation, if you wish to turn to it for a moment, chapter 3 of Revelation - and, by the way, I don't happen to believe that all the world is in the Laodicean age, but I believe that we in the West are. God speaks to seven churches, and to one of the churches He speaks to in chapter 3, He says this - verse 14: 'And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, increased with goods, I have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked'.

The word 'apathy' could characterise the church of Jesus Christ here today. It's like the teacher who went into the class - they were assigned to teach a class that no one wanted to do, but it was compulsory - and it was teeming over with students that didn't want to be there and were totally apathetic. And one day, that teacher walked down to the front of that lecture hall, it was one of those classes that everybody - a bit like church! - tries to get to the back few rows to get there first. But these two fellows came in and they longed to be at the back, but there were only two seats at the front. And they came to the front and the teacher began to teach his class, and it was self-evident to that teacher that no-one wanted to be there. The two fellows at the front were totally bored out of their minds, and the teacher got so frustrated that he took a piece of chalk and twirled round on his feet, and wrote in foot high letters on the board 'A-P-A-T-H-Y'. Apathy! Apathy! As he put the final exclamation mark, the chalk broke, and one of the wee fellows in the front row turned round to the other, and then he looked at the board and he looked at the word and the letters, and he turns to his friend: 'What in the world is 'A PATHYI'?'. And the other friend turned to him and, in a yawn, said 'Who cares?'. I think that is, perhaps, the way Jeremiah felt. He was weeping his eyes with tears, so much so, that there was no water left! He had to cry to God that his head would melt! He was pained at the situation of God's people, of their sinfulness, of their apathy. They just didn't care [about] anything!

My friend, I pray that God would deliver us from such a heart, for the heart that God wants is found in verse 13, this is the type of person that...I find perhaps within the word of God there are four types of hearts in relation to our zeal after God. First is the passive heart, the second I want to bring before you is the partial heart, the third is the persistent heart and the fourth is the prized heart. Let's look at the first one: the passive heart. God says to us, verse 13: 'Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart' - but there are, within Christendom, passive hearts. What is an example of a passive heart? It is a heart that can come along to church, to the Bible reading, to the prayer meeting. It is a heart that can listen and walk out with a smile upon its face. It is the heart in the office and in the school and the university who can identify with the name of Christ and perhaps wears a badge upon their breast. It is a heart that is filled with theology and everything that is right, doctrinally speaking. It is a heart that says within it: 'I am in need of nothing!'. Passivity is to stand or to sit and do nothing, and to have everything done for you. It is the heart that, theologically speaking, believes that they were given absolutely everything at their conversion and therefore are in need of nothing. It is the heart that can quote to you the date and the time and the place they were converted of God, but have never ever moved on from that spot in time.

My friend, that is not the heart God wants. In fact, that is not the salvation I find within the word of God - and I fear that there is a day coming when many of us here will stand before the Throne and realise that we have fallen foul of a false gospel! God - and I've said it - does not ask for a date, He does not ask for a place, He does not ask the name of the preacher, or a decision card - God asks a life that is holy! And if He sees a life that is holy, He sees a child that is His - for when Christ took the cross, He gave you a cross, a cross for you to die on. I have, burned into my heart, the theology of revival - and it is there, not by persuasion but by conviction, I believe it with every bone in my body. But I see a problem, I see a problem within evangelicalism and particularly within fundamentalism - and it is this Laodicean mentality that we are in need of nothing. A.W. Tozer put it like this: 'It is the ignoble contentment that takes place of the burning zeal. We are satisfied to rest in our judicial possessions and, for the most part, we bother ourselves very little about the absence of personal experience'. How many times have you heard it said within the word of God: 'If it says it' - and I've said it - 'If it says it, I believe it and that settles it'? Well, there is a measure of truth within that statement but I believe that within our circles - particularly here in Iron Hall - we may have fallen into a trap that has been laid by the devil himself, and it is the trap of evangelical fundamental textualism. That you take the letter of the law and you give an intellectual, mental assent to it and that takes the place of your personal everyday experience - it does not!

Tozer went on to say: 'This textualism assumes, for instance, that if we have the word for a thing', the word of God on a thing, 'we have the thing itself'. 'If it's in the Bible it is in us, if we have the doctrine in the word of God, we automatically have the experience within the word of God. If something was true of Paul it is true of necessity of me, because I accept Paul's epistles and letters as divinely inspired'. The Bible tells us how we can be saved, doesn't it? But textualism tells us that the Bible tells us we are saved! Because Christ died, does that save you? Does it? Because you know, from this book, that Christ died and even that Christ died for sinners, will that save you? When you stand before God, will you say: 'It says here that Christ died for sinners' - but you, in your life, have never had a personal experience of the regeneration of God in your heart - of course it doesn't matter! Because the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, does that mean you are filled with the Holy Spirit? Because Paul the apostle was converted on the road to Damascus, does that mean you have been converted? Of course it doesn't! Because Paul fought a good fight, does that mean that you have fought a good fight? And as I hear it said of many people that pass on - because many have had it heard in their ears in eternity: 'Well done thou good and faithful servant' - does it mean we'll hear it? I think not. And I feel the Holy Spirit saying to me - as I look into the New Testament especially, and take all the experiences of men of God for my own because I believe they happened - I hear Him say to me, as I say 'Lord, what shall this man do?': 'David, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me, follow Me!'. My friend, the passive heart sits and says: 'I have need of nothing'. It doesn't find a place within its heart for the hymn we've sung: 'We taste Thee, oh Thou Living Bread, and long to feast upon Thee still' - they have tasted and they don't long to feast any more, they're quite happy with enough of Him that they've got.

Then there is the partial heart, what are the examples of them? It is the one who knows what to do, the one who knows how to live but just can bring themselves to it - they're blown about by every wind of doctrine. One week they're spiritual, the next week they're carnal - and they're trying their best, and they're double-minded the word of God would say. Perhaps they're disillusioned, perhaps they're doubting and asking the question, 'Is it worth it all? Is it worth to pay the cost for this Christianity? I just can't give up my sin, I just can't follow Christ the way I would long to'. And it even brings to their eyes that, when they look at people who seek after God, they think to themselves: 'They're a bit fanatical, aren't they?'. I heard a preacher say recently on tape: 'Strange, isn't it, that a Christian never sits beside you in the pew and puts his arm around you and says: 'Now, I'm getting a bit concerned about you because you're getting to rich. And you know, I've been looking at you and the clothes that you're wearing, you're starting to show fashion I'm getting a bit concerned about you'. Or maybe you put the arm around some intellectual that goes to college and is doing a PhD, and you say: 'I'm getting worried about your education, you're getting too clever' - but we have reams of people in the church of Jesus Christ that will look us eyeball to eyeball and say: 'Watch you don't become

fanatical! Be careful now, you'll harm yourself, you'll go mad! Oh, I know it's the word of God and all - but if you just stick to the word of God and prayer, you'll go barmy!'. That is the partial heart.

Can I turn you to Paul, who said this in Philippians 3:13, listen: 'This one thing I do' - can a soldier fight in the army if he's got affairs at home? That's what he said to Timothy. How can you do it? How can you be a pastor and a businessman? How can you be a Christian and your heart is not with Christ? How can you be a Christian and your heart is not within the local assembly, the body of Christ represented here in this part of the vineyard? How can you do it? You can't do it! You can't be a Christian with a passive heart, you can't be a Christian with a partial heart! You must be a Christian who - it says in verse 13 - seeks God with all their heart! It is the persistent heart.

What is the persistent heart? Turn with me to Luke chapter 18, Luke chapter 18 - a fascinating story - the Lord says in verse 1: '[Speaking a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint], There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily'. It's interesting, the phrase that He finishes the story with: 'Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?'. I wonder, my friend, when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find a persistent heart in all of humanity - that's what He's saying. This little woman, I imagine, day by day that she was at the very door of this judge - perhaps she wouldn't let him get to sleep, she was giving him no rest hammering on the door for her answer - persisting, why? Because she had a heart after her desire. And our desire is God - or it ought to be - and we need to have a heart after God.

In Luke chapter 11 we find a similar story. We find about a man on his journey and he knocks the door, and a man has to get out of bed and he complains about how he's been in bed, and the whole family's in bed - and this man wants a bit of bread. And after - because of the man at the doors importunity, the word of God says, because of his persistence, he brings him the bread - and Jesus says: 'How much more', listen!, 'How much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?'. Because He gave it to Paul, does that mean you have it? Because Paul had experiences of God in a living way throughout his life? My friend, can I ask you: are you giving God no rest in your life - as the Psalmist says, are you following hard after God: 'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so my soul panteth after thee, O God!'! You know that Christianity is more than doctrine held, it's life enjoyed, isn't it? It's life abundant - the Levitical priest would go into the tabernacle and they would see the flame of the presence of God, and that would testify to them that God was there - not only because they knew it, but because they saw it! I imagine that little Jewish boy peeking out of the tent, just around there, the tabernacle, at night in the wilderness, and at night he could see the pillar of fire, and during the day when he peeked out of the tent he could see the cloud of smoke - and he looked, and he could say: 'God is with us!'.

Paul sought God and he found God. Ezekiel sought God, as a watchman of God, and he found God. Daniel sought God three times a day and he found God. David found God, 'Evening, and morning, and afternoon will I pray and cry aloud, and seek Thy face, and I shall hear Thy voice', he found God because he persisted after God. Paul prayed without ceasing after God. Jacob was woken in the middle of the night and he wrestled with God. I imagine, if I was wakened in the middle of the night by an angel I would turn over and go back to sleep. This wasn't the kind of Christianity the disciples followed, this wasn't the kind of practice they had. I wonder if an angel from heaven came and visited us here in the Iron Hall, or in your home, and he saw the way we lived - and perhaps he had visited ages gone by, Paul the apostle, and great Augustine, and David Brainerd, and Martin Luther, and Finney, and all the rest, Moody, and he saw their lives, their

apostolic lives - and then he comes to us and he looks, and maybe he sits in on one of our Bible readings on Ephesians, and he hears about all the possessions that we're claiming as our own: 'We're blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places'. And then he goes home in the car with us and he sees the reality of our life - would he not be right in asking the question: 'Is there not a contradiction here between what you think you are and what you really are?'. Could he not point the finger at us and accuse us of trifling with words as our souls are starving? - and he might well conclude that we are spiritual liars!

My friend, we need to get back to God! God - remember Him? - who it is all about! The One with whom we will have to do, the One whom we need, the One whom we cannot do without - we need to get back to Him! We need to search for Him, we need to seek after Him with all our hearts! The disciples couldn't feed the thousands until they received bread from the Lord Himself - isn't that right? They couldn't flow out the living water of the Spirit of God until they had that living water welling up within their souls. And the great tragic cry in the Song of Solomon is this: 'Anothers vineyard have I kept, but mine own vineyard have I not kept'. If Paul was preaching today, I imagine they'd all be lining up and saying: 'Now, Paul, you've got to watch your health. Now, Paul, you're going to make people think that these Christians are abnormal. You're going to get a reputation as an extremist. You better watch, mentally you could become unbalanced' - and the theologians would all be lining up with their Bibles, edited by men, and their schemes and say: 'Now Paul, this says you're accepted in the well-beloved. Now Paul, it says you're already blessed with all the blessings in Christ'. But we need to follow Paul, not just from the mountains of doctrine, but we need to go with him through the valleys and the peaks of his experience! That's what we need. We need, in seeking God, to search for Him - for God says: 'Never, ever has a man sought Me in vain'.

Finally, as we finish, we find that this persistent heart is a prized heart. Verse 14 says: 'I will be found of you' - isn't that beautiful? I love the story of Moses in Exodus chapter 33 - and Moses is there before God and it says, on one occasion, that whenever Moses went to meet God, he went in and out of the tent and he talked with God as a man talked with his friend. One day Moses was in before God - face to face with the living God! - and he says: 'Lord, if I have found grace in Thy sight, show me Thy way', he said, 'Lord, show me Thy glory!'. And the word of God says that when Moses sought God, and searched for Him with all his heart, the very next day, in solemn procession, God paraded past him in all His majesty.

Augustine was right when he said: 'Thou hast formed us for Thyself and our hearts are restless 'til they find rest in Thee'. Paul said: 'I count all dung, that I might win Christ'. Oh, we would come up to Paul and say: 'But you have Christ! You have need of nothing! You have every spiritual blessing in heavenly places!' - 'I count all dung, oh, that I might know Him!' - 'But Paul, you do know Him!'. Do you remember Elijah's mantle? You know how Elisha got it? By following hard after Elijah and not taking his eyes off him.

My friend, Faber was right when he said:

'Tis not enough to save our souls, to shun eternal fires,
The thought of God will raise the heart to more sublime desires!'

Madame Guyon said:

'Still, still without ceasing,
I feel it increasing,
The fervour of holy desire.
And often exclaim:
'Let me die in the flame'.
Oh, a love that can never expire!'

Is that our desire? Is our desire after God? Is our desire to know God, and to search for God, and to seek God until we find God with all our heart, until He says to us in a voice that we cannot put our hands on our ears to - we will have to listen to it! - 'Thou art found of Me'. How will you do it? There's an old Chinese sage that says this: 'The journey of a thousand miles begins with a first step' - and I say to us all today, listen: draw near to God, and He will draw near to thee.

Let us pray together and bow our heads. The Lord told His children in captivity that He would be found of them when they began praying - and you know, a sure sign that God wants to work among His people is when He sets them praying. Now, if you're in the meeting today and you feel, and you've the spirit that you're in need of nothing, I say this reverently: even God can't do anything with you. You should forget about all this church, you'd be better off leaving if God can't work in your heart because you've need of nothing. But if you have been made naked before God today, in Christ's name I implore you to follow hard after Him and to never rest until you know the flame of His presence in your soul.

Our Father, we thank Thee for the blessing of God Almighty, we thank Thee for the delight of communion with God. But, oh, we feel that Thou art standing at the door of this very place today, and Thou art knocking, but You can't get in. You can't get into our lives, into our homes, into our career, into our minds, into our pocket - oh God, we pray, may we be given grace today to open the door and start supping with the Son of God. For it is in His name we pray, Amen.

The Heart Of The Matter - Chapter 6

"The Trusting Heart"

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Now turn with me in your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 3, the book of Proverbs and chapter 3. We've been going through this series on Lord's Day mornings on what the Bible has to say about the heart - the human heart. We have looked at many studies so far, and we're looking this morning at 'The Trusting Heart' from Proverbs chapter 3 verses 5 and 6. As I said before these are very well known verses of scripture and we, many of us, know them off by heart - but, like many verses, it's a different thing living them with all of your heart. Verse 5: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths".

If you look at verse 1, we'll read right down to that verse to get the context of what Solomon has already been saying: "My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths".

'The Trusting Heart' - 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths'. Charles Bridges says of this proverb, one proverb it is together, that this is 'the polar star of the child of God'. This is the North Star - and just as it guides the mariners in the open ocean, these verses are able to guide the child of God in his life. It is a promise for each child of God that they can know and, indeed, after knowing and having revealed to them the will of God, they can do God's will in their life to the glory of God. I believe that the word of God teaches us that it is God's will that we should know His will, for God wants us to walk in His ways, to follow His commands and His precepts - and it is by doing that that we will be fully satisfied in God as our Father.

Ephesians, that we're been going through on Monday nights, spells that out - and indeed the verses that we'll be looking at tomorrow evening in chapter 5 and verses 8 to 10 tell us this: 'For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk therefore as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord'. We are to prove in our lives what is acceptable unto God, in other words: what is God's will. When we were in our trespasses and in our sins - dead, as we have been learning - there was no way of us knowing God's will for our lives, indeed God's will was purely that we should be sent down to hell and suffer for sin, for that is God's will for all of those who are outside of Christ. But when we became children of light, you remember how we learnt that we enter into a new adventure, whereby God blesses us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in the Lord Jesus. And now we are no longer darkness, but we are the children of light - therefore we are to walk in the light as children of the light, proving what is acceptable unto the Lord, what is the will of God. Therefore we know that we can know the will of God, and therefore we can do the will of God!

Many questions - and varied questions - are asked about how I can know the will of God. First all: is it possible for me individually to know the will of God for my life? And, if it is possible: how can I know it? I read a story in the last week of a woman who wanted to visit the Holy Land, and she began reading a pamphlet about that holiday. And she was wondering: should she go or should she not go? Was it the will of

God? Before she went to bed one evening, she flicked through the pamphlet again and, just before she went to sleep, she happened to see that the plane she was going to be travelling out on was a Boeing 747 Jumbo. And that night as she lay in bed, she tossed and she turned all night, wondering whether it was God's will for her to go to the Holy Land on a holiday. And she woke the next morning abruptly, and as she woke her eyes opened and she was able to see her digital clock beside her bed and it read the time 7:47 - and she decided that that was God! God was telling her to go on that holiday, so she booked it and she went. I think many of us could tell stories about situations such as that - about how men and women believe that God has guided them into certain situations - and we maybe could have a television programme called 'That's Unbelievable!', about all these stories of how men and women are guided by God's will.

Another one was about a pastor who, before he became a pastor was a deacon in many churches for many years. And when he became a pastor he felt he was undereducated and he was very tempted to buy a doctor's degree. And he was seeking God's will concerning this: 'Should I buy it or should I not?'. One morning as he was doing his devotions he opened the Bible at 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 13 which read: 'For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a high degree' - and that's how he took God's guidance. And as we hear stories such as these - and some of us may even have the stories in our own life - it seems that, a great extent of the time, the guidance of God in our life has got more to do with pot luck, more to do with circumstantial evidence, hapness - things that happen, and because we are looking for them, or we are desiring a certain thing, we believe it is God's will. Like the prospective missionary that was driving along the street and his car ran out of petrol outside the Philippine embassy, and he decided that that was God's call to him to go to the Philippines. And one writer asked the question: what would he have done if he was stranded in an elevator with a single woman called Sally? Would he have taken it from God that that was his partner for life?

How can we know the will of God? And then, when we know it, is it possible to do what God wants us to do in our lives? Now I want to say this that: we have evolved into an 'instant society'. Everything is instant: instant coffee, instant everything, instant money from the wall - we very rarely have to wait, or have to look, or have to seek anything within our lives. And therefore, when we come to faith in Christ and we want to know what God has for our lives, we seek an instant formula for God's guidance. In other words: if I get A-B-C right in my life, then I know that that is God's will for me. We're a bit like Gideon - I'm not going to get into whether it was right or wrong for Gideon to put out the fleece, but we can make up all these sorts of signs and wonders that we ask God for in order to know the right path of our lives. There is no instant formula for the will of God - and because of that many believers, so-called, do not know the will of God for their life, therefore it follows that they are not behaving in a way that is according to His sovereign will. And I think the inference there must be that they have resigned themselves to a life that is of self-choice - what they believe is God's will for them, the path that their own intelligence has dictated that they should follow, and the life that they should be in.

But these two verses, if you look down at them, they tell us the exact opposite: that although there isn't an A-B-C-D formula of how to know the will of God, it is possible to know and to do the will of God in our lives. And although there isn't a quick formula, there are conditions that God says, if we fulfil them in our lives He will meet our directive in the paths that we follow and the choices that we make. Indeed Matthew Henry, the great commentator upon these verses, says this about the conditions that we have to meet for God to [give] guidance: 'We must have a continual regard to God's providence. We must own and depend upon it in all our affairs - both by faith and by prayer'. We must have a continual regard to God's providence - what is that? God always guides! It is the sovereignty of God, that God is in control and therefore we ought to throw ourselves on God's providence, we ought to own God's providence, not just know it in our minds or indeed feel it in our hearts in moments of sensationalism or emotionalism, but we are to walk our path day by day owning and depending upon His providence in all our affairs by both faith and prayer - the good man put it well.

And indeed that is what Solomon says within these two verses, and there are three expressions that I want to bring before you today from the word of God. What are the conditions that I must meet to know that I am walking [in] and fulfilling the will of God? Three verbs - one: trust. Verse 5: 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart'. Two: lean not - 'lean not unto thine own understanding but in all thy ways...', three: acknowledge. One: trust; two: lean not; and three: acknowledge.

Let us look at the first expression in verse 5: 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart'. That is what Matthew Henry means when he speaks of 'owning God's providence' - not just knowing about it, or recognising it, but in your own life owning it as your own and depending upon it in the affairs of your life - and he goes on: 'by faith and by prayer'. You could translate that word 'trust' as 'faith', couldn't you? 'Trust in the Lord', 'Have faith in the Lord', and what Solomon - the Holy Spirit indeed - is asking us as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ is to put our faith, our dependence upon your Heavenly Father. What are we to put our dependence upon in our Heavenly Father? The first thing is His providence, what we've already been speaking about, we are to depend, and inject our faith upon the fact that God is in control! Now that is very difficult to do when you are in the dark, when you're back's against the wall, when you're going through that tunnel and it seems that there's no light at the end of it, it is difficult to do - but that is when the rubber hits the road, that is when faith really counts, when you're able to put your faith in God's providence, you're able to know and own and depend that God is in control of all things, therefore God is in control of my world.

It is to put your faith in His providence and to put your faith in His promises. You see, God doesn't just tell us to know His providence, but He tells us to trust in His providence through His promises - and God has given us exceeding great and precious promises, whereby we have His word. We don't just have a knowledge in our heads, but in our hands in the word of God, we have it written in black-and-white from the very mouth of God that God will take care of you! We ought not just to know it, but we can put our trust and our faith in His precious promises. 'Trust in the Lord', in His providence, in His promises and also in His grace. You see this is where what we've been talking about in the weeks gone by - textualism - fails, when you just believe that God is something and can do something, and indeed you read it within the word of God so you believe it even more and you take it as read - but if that is not moved, and made an example in your own individual life, it is useless! Is that not true? If it's there in the word of God, if it's even in your head, but when life's experience comes along, it doesn't figure in experience - we might as well not have it! But the fact is, we can trust in God's providence in life, we can trust in His promises in His word, and we can also trust in His grace, His provision at the moment in time. We can trust in the Lord, yes, that He's in control; yes, that He says He's in control - but at that moment when we need to know He's in control, His grace will be sufficient for us.

Now do you trust in the Lord in that way? That is a trust of body, soul and spirit - it takes in the whole person, that you know that God's in control of your body. Now you could be waking up in the morning and look in the mirror and say: 'God's not in control of my body!'. Or perhaps you know some of the things that are going on inside your body, or without your body, and you think: 'Is God really in control?' - well, to trust God is to trust that He is in control! And although there are things taking place that are not satisfactory to you, and maybe not even to God, God is in control of it all! It is to trust Him for your soul, that is your personality, the seat of your affections, who you really are, the real you, your emotional mind and all that makes you up to be who you are, and the hurts that you've had, and the difficult trials and experiences that you've gone through - yes, your body can be hurt, your body can be ill, but it's when it comes into your heart and it brings emotional pain, it is to trust God that God is in control when you're going through even that! It is control of the spirit - and what I mean by that is: when you're staring death in the face, it is to trust that God owns your spirit and that it's blood-bought and it will go back to God who sent it. Now, my friend, do you know that? Can you say that? That when you lie there, about to give up the ghost - or rather, your ghost will be taken from you whether you like it or not - will you know and trust in the Lord, that He has

providence over your soul that it will not be lost into eternal darkness for ever, but you can know from the authority of the word of God, and from a conversion experience, that God is yours! That is what it is to trust in God - it is a full commitment, without any reserve, to throw yourself - cast yourself - upon God, and listen: it doesn't stop at salvation, but it goes on as God directs our lives.

The sad thing is, an unbeliever cannot trust God. That is not that God cannot be trusted, but he cannot trust God. The reason being: he has no confidence toward God. The wrath of God abides on him because he has rejected God and His Gospel and His Christ and His cross - and, therefore, because he has no confidence toward God, he cannot trust God and he has made God his enemy, he has shaken his fist in the face of God, therefore he has no assurance toward God. My friend, that is the greatest mistake that you can make: to think that it'll be alright on the night when you meet God face-to-face - it will not! Unless you have this trust, this assurance toward God that is brought only through the cross of Christ, the atonement of God, the blood of Jesus Christ has reconciled men to God - and therefore, if we are in Christ, we are assured that we have Him as our friend and as our counsellor. Do you?

It is to trust in the Lord, look at the verse, and that word 'Lord' is the word for Jehovah: 'Yahweh'. It is the Hebrew verb 'to be' and it is in the three tenses here: the One who was, the verb to be past; the One who is, the verb to be present; and the One who shall be, the verb to be future. Meaning: this is the One whom I'm trusting, not some comic-cut figure, it's not some idea in a theologians head, or an image on a religious picture - this is the One who I am trusting, the One who always has been, is, and ever shall be: Jehovah. And this is a child-like, unwavering, confidence in our Father - why? Because He has been well proven, because He is wise and because He is faithful.

You remember in 2 Chronicles 14 and verse 11, Asa prayed unto the Lord and said: 'Lord, it is nothing with thee to help' - it means nothing to You, Lord, You'll not be tired from helping me, from giving me a little bit of strength - 'whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee'. That is trusting in God! That is a child-like, unwavering trust. Like the trust of Jeremiah, as God called him as a prophet to the nation, the cry came back from that little child: 'Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord'. That is trust.

An ever expanding world around us gives many, many choices, and at times we don't know what choices to make - but God says: 'Look to Me. Trust in Me'. And to limit your confidence in God is a sin! To not trust in God, as a child of God, is a sin - you remember in Psalm 78, we looked at it a few months ago, the children of Israel out in the desert and they were complaining about the manna, the bread that was sent down from heaven, they wanted something more spicy like the food from Egypt and it says: 'They tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust. Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?'. 'Is God able to be trusted? Is God able to give grace that will meet my need? Is God able to stand where I am at this moment and minister to me in such a situation that I am in?' - yes! And if we do not trust God it is sin: 'Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? Can he provide flesh for his people? Therefore the Lord heard this, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel' - why? Because they didn't trust in their God.

If I have a message from the Lord today, it's this: God wants you to trust Him. He just wants you to put all your faith upon Him, to take Him at His word - His word has been proved - and to the utmost extent prove His power in your life! Believe He is able for your situation, believe He is able to do what is wise, to do what is best, to be faithful to His promises - and we can live upon the fact that all things work together for good to

them that love God, to them that are the called according to His purpose. Those who love Him, those who serve Him, can trust Him! Do you trust Him? Do you know who the One is you're trusting in? Jehovah, Jehovah-Jireh, God my provider. 'Trust in Jehovah with all your heart' - that's what the verse says, isn't it? 'With all your heart', that means it's an entire trust, it is an exclusive trust, there can be no other confidence in anyone else, or anything else whether internally or externally. As Paul says [in] Philippians 3:3: 'have no confidence in the flesh' - no confidence in yourself, no confidence in a loved one, or a doctor, or medicine, no confidence in anyone except God!

It's hard, isn't it, to have entire submission and dependence on God to rule our lives? Why is it hard? Do you know why it's hard? Because fallen man - right from when he fell in the garden of Eden, as the children were learning today - fallen man leans on his own understanding. He is misguided by his own ideas and desires and wishes - therefore the second thing that God tells us today: 'Yes, trust in Me and I will lead you if you trust in me, but you've got to lean not unto your own understanding'. We're very able in our age today, we're maybe the most educated age that has ever been, technologically speaking it's mind-blowing what men are able to do today in the medical field. It's amazing, isn't it? Sometimes when you watch programmes - and recently I watched someone getting a hand transplant - it's amazing, isn't it? But do you know what can happen? Our own knowledge and our own ability and power can become our idol - and we can know so much that we lean too much upon our own understanding, and our own understanding can take the place of God because we start to trust in it. And the proof that we do that is that we look at God's truth and we think upon it before we act upon it! Don't we? I suppose we're doing that this morning in a way - we're taking God's word and we're weighing it up to see if it's worth trusting. God is to trust, God is the truth - and we're even leaning on our own understanding when we're contemplating whether or not to trust in God! Yet we forget what God said in Jeremiah and in chapter 17 and verse 5: 'Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord'. Cursed is everyone that trusts in themselves - not because God curses them, but because they are fallen in their own heart and inevitably the choices they will make will curse them themselves!

Charles Bridges says in his great commentary on Proverbs: 'It is nothing less than self-idolatry to conceive that we can carry on, even in the ordinary matters of everyday, without God's counsel'. Harry Ironside put it: 'Confidence in self is like leaning on a broken reed'. Do you see this? This is the mother of all sins! This is the confidence that Adam and Eve had in themselves in the garden of Eden! They believed: 'We shall be as gods! Just think of what we'll be because we take of this fruit!', and they ignored God's advice and they leant on their own understanding and they sinned and fell upon their face. It is the mother of all sins! But the tragedy is: in our own lives we can unconsciously be making these decisions apart from God - making decisions everyday and we don't even realise we're doing it without God! I thought when I was preparing this, that at times I'm sure God sees us as the know-it-all teenagers that we see in the world today. 'We know best, we know the choices to make' - and if we're honest with ourselves, largely our own understanding guides our course, and when we ask advice even of others, we ask those who we know we're going to get the right advice from - the advice we want!

Yes, in the beginning we were made in the image of God and we, perhaps, had a capacity to understand correctly - but now because of the fall we are darkened. We learnt from Jeremiah that our heart is deceitful above all things, desperately wicked, who can know it - and I would translate that in this context: 'Who can trust it?! It is rebellious because of the fall, and God pronounced that in Jeremiah 2:13: 'My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water'. Jeremiah 9:23: 'Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches' - for if he does all that, he will come to ruin. As Isaiah said in 47:10: 'Thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me. Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence

it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know'. When we direct our paths, when we trust our own wisdom and guidance it is inevitable, God says, that we will fall flat upon our faces.

Solomon, in Proverbs 28, pronounced that: 'He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool' - we do trust in our own hearts so much, don't we? But bluntly, to lean not on our own understanding - do you know what it is to do? It is to lean on our knees. Remember Henry: 'It is to own the providence of God and depend upon it in all our affairs, both by faith and by prayer' - the faith that's trusting God in His providence, in His promises and in His provision of grace - but it is to fall on our knees and never for one moment rely on our own experience or our own knowledge, and fall upon our knees before God and cry to Him, throwing our understanding aside! What does the hymn say? 'Cast care aside, lean on thy Guide'.

Trust, lean not, and acknowledge. Verse six: 'In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths' - do you know something? God loves to be trusted! God loves to be consulted! God loves to be acknowledged! And therefore what I want to encourage you to do today is to take all your unresolved problems to God! Do it! Bring them to God and trust that God is able, and that God will, and God will provide - and get on your knees before God and acknowledge God, and gave Him over everything and trust Him! We need to cultivate the habit of going to God first - we don't do that, do we? We go to our friend, or our wife, or our husband, or we lift the phone, or to an experienced Christian - and we don't go to God first! As one author says: 'We ought to consider no circumstance too clear to need God's direction'. Faith is how we own God's providence, prayer is how we own and depend upon God's providence - and even in circumstances where we feel that we don't know what to do, we fall upon God. You see, that's the proof that we are never to lean on our own understanding - why? Because the majority of the time our own understanding doesn't give us the answer. The majority of the time we're looking into the dark - and it is faith, it is to fall upon God - but usually we stand looking into the dark and don't fall upon Him!

You see, this Christian life is not the survival of the fittest, it's not who knows the best, or who can do the best, or who can come out the other end in one piece. A little girl was about to undergo an operation, and the doctor was just about to put her on the operating table. He said to her: 'Before we can make you better, we must put you to sleep' - and the girl smiled and looked up at him and said: 'Well, doctor, if you're going to put me to sleep I must say my prayers first'. She knelt down beside that operating table and she said those famous words: 'Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray Thee Lord my soul to keep, and if I should die before I wake, I pray Thee Lord my soul to take'. And the surgeon said that afterwards he prayed that night for the first time in 30 years. That's what trusting in God is - to take to God all that is in your heart, and like a little child to leave it with your Father, your Abba Father, to 'acknowledge Him' - and this is what it says - 'in all your ways'. And this must be one of the hardest directives here to know the will of God, you might be saying: 'Here, He's not giving us any direction' - this is the direction! To trust God, for without faith it is impossible to please God - and the antithesis of faith is to lean on yourself, and not depend on God - and then to acknowledge God in all your ways, whether they're small ways, whether they're great ways, small concerns, large concerns, personal affairs, temporal things and eternal matters, is to come before God and acknowledge Him in all your ways.

Abraham, every time he moved house relatively speaking, he pitched his tent and he built an altar onto the Lord. He acknowledged God in his home life - and even when he was choosing a wife for Isaac, there was no worldliness about it. You go home and read it, in Genesis chapter 24, he didn't talk about wealth, he never talked about honour, he didn't talk about beauty. All he talked about to his servant, all he was concerned about was: what was the will of God and what brought honour to God's name - now that is acknowledging God in all your ways. Not worrying about God's choice, just worrying about whether it's God's choice. It is total surrender, it is the lordship of Christ in your life - where you say: 'Not my will, but Thine be done', where you have one single and pure desire to know God's will and to do it. As the Lord said in Matthew

6:22: 'The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light' - listen! If you want to know the will of God for your life: you follow Christ with all your heart! That's the only way! And the question must be asked that: if we aren't following the Lord with all our heart - can we expect to be guided of God?

Billy Strachan is able to put things in very pithy ways, and he says it like this: 'God is not so much interested in where you are, but rather in who you are' - isn't that right? You're maybe praying: 'Is it Mongolia? Is it Africa? Is it Brazil? Do You want me in that factory, in that firm? Do You want me at that University studying this? Lord, where do You want me?'. But God is not asking where He wants you, He's asking what He wants you to be - and when you become, in a holy way, what He wants you to be, you will be in no doubt about where He wants you to go! We get everything upside-down, don't we? Are you what God wants you to be? Are you trusting in the Lord? Are you leaning not on your own understanding? Are you acknowledging Him in all your ways? As Paul put it in Philippians: 'In everything making your requests known unto God'. In good times, in bad times, acknowledging Him - and here's the climax! 'He shall direct your paths' - no doubt about it! He'll do it, if you trust Him and if you don't lean on yourself and if you acknowledge Him in every area of your life, you can be sure He'll guide you. Now don't get me wrong, I believe He guides us at times even when we're unaware of it, for the steps of a righteous man are ordered by the Lord, and a man perceives something in his heart, but it's the Lord guides his steps. I believe God's sovereignty will always overrule, but if you want to enjoy the conscious direction of a Father God pointing you in the way to go, 'Walk ye in the way! Here it is!' - you've got to do these things! He'll direct you and, my friend, let me encourage you: if you put yourself under the divine guidance of God, you will always benefit from it! You'll never be disappointed. The only dangerous place to be is outside the will of God and, as Bridges says: 'If we be weaned from the idolatry of making our bosom our oracle, and our heart our counsellor, and if in true poverty of spirit we go every morning to our Lord as not knowing how to guide ourselves for this day, our eye continually looking up for direction - light will come down!'.

Do you study the word? Do you say like the Psalmist: 'My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, oh Lord. In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee and I will look up. Show me thy ways, oh Lord, teach me thy paths - lead me in thy truth and teach me, for thou art the God of my salvation, on thee do I wait all the day long!' There is no A-B-C, but God does say this: 'Trust in Me. Don't lean on yourself. Acknowledge Me in every way and I'll direct you'. Old Horatius Bonar put it like this in a poem, and I finish with this:

'Thy way, not mine oh Lord, however dark it be
Lead me by Thine own hand, choose out the path for me.

Smooth let it be, or rough, it will be still the best,
Winding or straight, it leads right on toward Thy rest.

I dare not choose my lot, I would not if I might,
Choose Thou for me, my God, so shall I walk aright,

The kingdom that I seek is Thine, so let the way
That leads to it be Thine, else I must surely stray.

Take Thou my cup, and it with joy or sorrow fill,
As best to Thee may seem - choose Thou my good and ill.

Choose Thou for me my friends, my sickness or my health,
Choose Thou my cares for me, my poverty or wealth.

Not mine, not mine the choice in things of great or small,
Be Thou my Guide, my Strength, my Wisdom and my All'.

And those who faithfully follow the pillar of cloud and fire will find, though it leads them perhaps at times through the desert, eventually it will bring them to Canaan at last. Let us bow our heads together, and if you are here in this meeting and you haven't trusted the Lord and you don't know the guidance of God in your life - in fact you don't know where your life's going at all - the Lord is here today, and He's here to save your soul and give you a direction in life. And all of you are children of God, why not afresh throw yourself into the arms of your omnipotent God and trust Him to lead the way?

Our Father, we thank Thee for such an one as Thee, who is able and who will do, and we pray that we will have the grace to trust Thee and to trust Thee to the end. In Jesus name, Amen.

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