

## 500 With purpose of heart

Last week we were encouraged by a bagful of scriptures concerning our present and future blessings in Christ, which by God's grace are "reserved in heaven" for us (I Peter 1.4end). As a follow-on from all these God-given blessings, the Holy Spirit has provided us throughout the New Testament with ample practical instructions as to what "a Christian life" is to mean in practice. One such instruction was given through Barnabas to the Christians in Antioch, when he - "exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11.23b, KJV).

The heart of each one of us is crucial, physically of course, but also spiritually. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it [are] the issues of life" and - "... the Lord pondereth the hearts" (Proverbs 4.23; 21.2b). God's covenant people are commanded - "... thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might", words which Jesus defines as "the first and great commandment" (Deuteronomy 6.5 / Matthew 22.37-38).

The Lord God expected the children of Israel to have such "purpose of heart" in their "cleaving" to Him, but rarely was this case. "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" (Deuteronomy 5.29). In these words we are given the constant, central, scriptural principle which undergirds both Old and New Covenants: obedience of heart to the Lord God brings His blessings – and vice-versa. Later on little had changed, for the Lord Jesus spoke of "the hardness" of the Jews' hearts (Mark 8.17end, 10.5); and - "For this people's heart is waxed gross" (Matthew 13.15a (from Isaiah 6.9-10)), and - "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with [their] lips; but their heart is far from me" (Matthew 15.8, from Isaiah 29.13)). (Sadly that still remains the case for most of the Jews today, but the Lord is unfolding His gracious plans for them, eg., Romans Chapter 11).

What a contrast are Jesus' own words! – "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest to your souls" (Matthew 11.29). Jesus' earthly life and ministry perfectly demonstrate what "purpose of heart" really means, for Him, and now for us too: an engrained, focussed, loving obedience to God the Father, (in our case, through His Son Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour), enables us properly to "cleave" to Him.

Jesus emphasises the relationship between our treasure and our hearts. Wherever our “treasure” – the things which matter most of all to us - is “laid up” in reality, be that on earth or in heaven, that is where our hearts will also be (from Matthew 6.19-21). How easy it is to allow our “purpose of heart”, even if well-meant, to become wrongly directed.

In Luke 6.45a we read, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good”, and in Luke 8.15, ending the parable of the sower, “But that (seed) on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep [it], and bring forth fruit with patience”.

Our “purpose of heart” is grounded in solid Christian assurance. Look at the core of the Gospel preaching throughout the Book of Acts, all based on incontrovertible, widely-witnessed facts concerning Jesus Christ, the Son of God, sent by God the Father, to be crucified, risen, ascended and glorified (egs., Acts 1.3; 2.22-40; 4.19-20; 5.29-33; 7.51-60; 9.3-9; 10.37-48; followed by many further examples from Paul’s missionary journeys). Would Paul, along with so many others, have had anything like such “purpose of heart”, doggedly “cleaving to the Lord”, even to martyrdom, if he was not 100% certain of God’s truth in Christ? Of course not!

And we are just the same, with the added blessings of the entire, well-proven Word of God in our own language, of Christian fellowship with one another in the Church, and of the indwelling Holy Spirit. As a result, we are assured of the plain truth of these well-known words - “... if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (from Romans 10.8-13 & Joel 2.32a).

So, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts ...” (Psalm 139.23), that with a purposeful heart I may continue to cleave faithfully to Him. Meanwhile Jesus tells us simply - “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me ... ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you” (John 14.1; 16.22).

On we go together, with purpose of heart, cleaving unto the Lord.

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