



Thought for the Week 16th May 2021

Readings: 1 Samuel 13:5-14 & 1 Samuel 16 1, 4-7

“The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7

The human heart is an amazing thing. It weighs a bit less than 300grams. It beats about 100,000 times in one day pumping life-giving blood around our bodies. That means it beats about 35 million times in a year or more than 2.5 billion times in an average lifetime. Without your heart your body would quickly cease to work. But, of course, we think of the heart as much more than its physical anatomy. What fella says to his girl, “I love you with all my blood pump!”

We live in a consumer-oriented, materialistic, hedonistic society bent on pleasing self. In comparison to some portions of the world, most of us are accustomed to very high levels of luxury by way of our comforts, pleasures, and security. With this has come the prominent idea that our happiness comes in accomplishments, in recognition, in material possessions, comfort, and the like. We have come to believe the mistaken (and Satan promoted) notion that if we just acquire certain things, then we can be truly happy and even secure. As a result, people develop their own agendas by which they seek to climb the mountain of success or happiness.

As Christians, we may have rejected some or even a lot of these notions. Yet, the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, and because we are all so easily influenced by the world around us, our hearts need guarding. Scripture clearly teaches us that the real issues of life are spiritual and are really matters of the heart, the inner man. Maybe it’s for this reason the word “heart” is found so many times in the Bible. Because the word “heart” can be translated in a number of ways, depending on the context, the number of times it is found varies in the different translations of the English Bible (over 800 times in the KJV, and almost 600 in the NIV). As these numbers suggest, the heart is a prominent concept and one of the most commonly used words of the Bible – but not as a blood pump!

In Hebrew thought the heart is the control centre of our thoughts, feelings and emotions. The heart is a metaphor for the inner life. It is the seat of our physical, spiritual and mental life. The heart is the centre and the source of the whole inner life – thinking, feeling, and willing. And scripture is very clear that God is concerned about your heart. And thinking of the heart in this way, He wants you to have a healthy heart.

The Lord said to Samuel when he was sent to choose a new king for the people of Israel, *‘The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart’* (1 Samuel 16:7). I want to encourage us today to turn our hearts toward God because so many of our troubles in life have come because we have wandered from God. God wants us to be like David who was called “a man after God’s own heart.”

Saul the first king of Israel had turned out to be a disappointment because he had not followed God’s ways. And so in 1 Samuel 13:14 the prophet give this devastating message to Saul, “Your kingdom will not endure for the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart; and the Lord has appointed him to be

ruler over his people.” The second book of Samuel begins with reports of the deaths of Saul and his son Jonathan.. Then David is anointed as King.

Let’s think about David and why he is called ‘a man after God’s own heart”. What qualities of David led to that designation? Which must lead us on to ask, “How can we be more like David when he was at his best - and avoid the dangers of being like him at his worst?”

In the Psalms which he penned we find at several reasons why David is “A Man After God’s Own Heart.”

He Worshipped God

David was hungry for God, he sought after God, he had a passion for spiritual things, and he tried to please God despite his failures. He penned 73 Psalms of worship and he may have also written some of the anonymous Psalms; these lyrics express his deep desire for God and his heart-felt worship. Centuries later we still use these Psalms to inspire our hearts to worship God.

Psalm 9:1-2 *“I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. ² I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High.”*

He Obeyed God’s Word

Psalm 86:11 *“Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name.”*

Psalm 27:7-8 *“⁷ Hear my voice when I call, LORD; be merciful to me and answer me. ⁸ My heart says of you, ‘Seek his face!’ Your face, LORD, I will seek.”*

Throughout his life David sought to give glory to God and was attentive to what God taught him.

He Trusted God

Psalm 27:1 *“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”*

Psalm 62:8 *“Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.”*

When life is hard, we are called upon to trust him through the storms and trials of life. *“Without Him I could do nothing.”*

He Loved God

Psalm 18:1 *“I love you, O Lord, my strength.”*

The greatest commandment is to love God. He has shown such great love for us. How do we show our love for God? By listening to Him, living for Him, and loving His children.

Romans 8:28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

He was Faithful to God

Psalm 23:6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Psalm 119:34 Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.

Our commitment to God is not a Sunday only thing, nor is it just for children - it is a life long following. It is a journey of a lifetime!

He was Penitent to God

Psalm 25:11 "For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great."

Some of the best known stories of David's life are about his failures. Yet he always came back to the Lord in prayer, asking for forgiveness, determined to change.

Acts 2:38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Conclusion

Remember what God told Samuel: *"The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."*

When the Lord saw David's heart, he saw a man who worshipped God, who obeyed God's Word, trusted in God and loved him with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. He was faithful to God but also recognised his sins and failings and repented of them.

We could easily be overwhelmed by that list of qualities! But they were not qualities David needed to manufacture within himself, that were just outward manifestations of someone who sought God throughout all their life - not perfectly - at times broken - at times prideful - at times self-seeking. Even so, David's example is a great road map for how we are to live our life.

Like David we need to start by saying: *"O God, I have sinned against you and I have done evil things in your sight. Create in me a clean heart, and give me a right spirit."*

Then we need to focus on turning our hearts toward God by thinking about the qualities we see in David's life and how we can grow in our own commitment to the Lord in the same way.

David responded to God and His word - and today we must do the same. What is your response to God's love, grace, and mercy? His offer to save you for eternity? Every man, woman, boy, or girl today can be a person after God's heart. It doesn't matter what your background is, or what mistakes you've made. Just say: "God, here is my confession of sin and here are my experiences, my gifts, my talents, my weaknesses. I'm going to submit to you and let you open the doors so that I may glorify you."

PCI Let's Pray

Sunday 16 May

Moderator

Pray for politicians in all parties as they debate matters which affect us all. Especially, pray regarding the major liberalisation to abortion legislation in Northern Ireland.

Strength and peace in worship

'The Lord give strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.' Psalm 29:11. Today as we worship in person, online or on our own, ask God that he would strengthen us as his people and bless our hearts with his peace.

Monday 17 May

Global Mission - Covid-19

Pray for those living in countries where healthcare and state support is limited. Pray for India where case numbers are extremely high and for neighbouring countries including Nepal where case numbers are rising fast. Pray for PCI's partners in India and Nepal at this difficult time.

Global relief and development

Pray for Christian Aid, Tearfund and PCI partners around the world involved in humanitarian relief and development work, reaching out to those in greatest need in the name of Jesus.

Tuesday 18 May

University & College Chaplains

Pray for Rev Dave Gray at Queen's University Belfast and Derryvolgie Halls and Revs Cheryl Meban, John Coulter and Graeme Orr at the various campuses of Ulster University as they continue to support students and staff during Covid-19 restrictions. Pray for students preparing for and sitting exams.

Prison Chaplains

As restrictions ease and chaplains are allowed more contact with prisoners, pray for wisdom and God's guidance for them as they seek to bring the hope of the gospel and transformation to many.

Wednesday 19 May

James & Heather Cochrane (global mission workers in Portugal)

Pray that the new Bible Course which Comunidade Pedras Vivas is launching will help members to share the Bible with friends and neighbours.

Volker & JinHyeog Glissmann (global mission workers in southern Africa)

Pray for Volker as he works with colleagues in the Theological Education by Extension College in Johannesburg, revising courses for their distance learning programme. They are working through the Christian Ethics workbooks at present.

Thursday 20 May

Lisbellaw, Lisnaskea, Maguiresbridge & Newtownbutler (Co Fermanagh)

Pray for the work and witness of these home mission congregations. Pray for wisdom and guidance for Rev Rodney Beacom and the kirk sessions.

Maynooth

Pray for a return to face-to-face services and as they share their worship space with a new Irish school. Pray for the new building project - give thanks that the site contracts are finally ready for signing.

Friday 21 May

Social Witness

Pray for the work and witness of the Disability Services Committee as they oversee the work of Willow Brook, Aaron House, Lawnfield and Peacehaven. Pray for the residents and tenants as they adjust to new freedoms within the new guidelines.

Victims and Survivors

Pray for those who have been impacted by the conflict in Northern Ireland and for whom public discussions about dealing with the past trigger painful and distressing memories. Pray that they would know the reality of the peace and comfort that comes from God.

Saturday 22 May

General Council

Pray for the meeting of the Irish Inter Church Committee (IICC) taking place during the incoming week. This is the forum where the IICC's denominations meet with representatives of the Bishops' Conference to discuss issues of mutual concern.

Linkage Commission

The Commission is due to meet on 25 and 26 May, with up to eight vacant congregations seeking permission to call a minister. Give thanks that the easing of Covid-19 restrictions now make it easier for congregations to hear and call a minister, and pray that the Lord will give wisdom to the Commission as they consider requests, and seek the upbuilding of the Lord's Church.