**The Lord looks on the heart**  15/1/23 dkm

Read: 1Samuel 16:1-13, Matthew 15:1-20

Text: 1Samuel 16:7

Psalms: 139a:1-10, 139b:17-24, 19:7-14, 134a

Have you got a surveillance camera on the front of your house? I am thinking of getting one- not that we have been burgled of late. There are so many cameras around the city that it is hard to escape them. In China I am told it is impossible! And then there is social media where people think they can write or says things in private! I sometimes feel sorry for people when things they said are did in their youth are dragged up as slander against them. If you have done nothing wrong of course, there will be nothing to drag up anyway! Is social media reminding us of what life is like as a child of God in that God knows everything we do and say anyway?

When Adam and Eve sinned against God they tried to hide from the Lord God (Gen 3:10). But the Lord found them, and confronted them about their disobedience to his command. One of the first things we are taught about God is that he is omnipresent, that he is present everywhere, so it is impossible to hide from him- just read Psalm 139 or the Book of Jonah. But still we think that God does not see behind closed doors. Even if there are no surveillance cameras, God still sees us and what we are doing. God also hears every word we speak. Some are afraid of microphones not being turned off and catching foul words which they speak off camera. But God hears, and will hold us to account, for every word we speak (Mat 12:36, 37). We should be people who fear God more than we fear man.

Perhaps we should be most concerned about God’s omniscience, God knowing everything, even our thoughts (Ps 139:2). Yes, God knows the very thoughts of our hearts. God sees what we are thinking. How often do we play the hypocrite, acting in a loving way and saying nice things while inside we are full of bitterness and envy? How often do we mouth words in worship when our hearts or thoughts are far from God (Isa 29:13)? We are commanded to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul and all our mind, so let us be worshipping the Lord from the heart and with our whole heart.

Our focus today is on the words of our text, found in 1Samuel 16:7, as we continue looking at a few key verses in this book of the Bible. The Lord made it very clear to Samuel, when he sent him to anoint a new king, that the Lord does not see as man sees because man looks on the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart. We just referred to sin entering the world and Adam trying to physically hide from the Lord when he came into the garden. That sin corrupted the heart of Adam; he felt guilty and tried to hide. A corrupted heart, a heart corrupted by sin, is the fundamental problem of every person in this world. Satan effectively gained control of man’s heart when he tempted Eve, then Adam, and they sinned against God. This is why returning to the Lord is more than a matter of rituals or sacrifices or good works; it is a matter of having our hearts changed, of being delivered from the power of Satan into the liberty only Christ can give; ‘If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed’ (John 8:36).

Moving on from Adam we come to the evil generation of Noah’s day. We will then look at the words of our text in 1Samuel before looking at Isaiah 29:19. We will then look at what Jesus has to say about man’s heart, and finally at what the apostle Paul says.

**1. Noah**

‘Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually’ (Gen 6:5). In the margin next to this verse I have written the words, ‘Total depravity’. There are some who teach that man is capable of doing good; all that is needed is good intentions and personal discipline. When I say, ‘some’ I mean most people, including many in the church.

Augustine, a reformer long before the time of Luther and Calvin, contended with a man called Pelagius who denied original sin and taught that man is basically good- that ‘grace merely enables us to do more easily what we could still do without it; albeit with greater difficulty’. The words of Scripture here in Genesis 6:5 make it clear that not only was the generation of Noah’s day wicked but that they were wicked from the heart; every thought all the time was of wickedness. Noah alone found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

Even good deeds can be done with evil motives, something we call, and Jesus calls, hypocrisy. The Lord looks on the heart and judges according to what he sees in the heart. How often do we hear people who have messed up in their lives, maybe ending up in prison, writing a book to tell young people not to mess up in their lives? They find this cathartic, as they say, a way to get rid of their guilt. Why can’t young people read the Bible and follow its teachings rather than learn from someone who has messed up their life? This celebrity, as they often are, probably read books written by an older celebrity who messed up his or her life! And so it goes on. Why? Because our hearts are corrupt and no matter how many memoirs we read, our hearts will not be changed. It is only by reading the Bible and by the grace of God that our lives will be changed. What are the thoughts and intents of your heart? Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

**2. Samuel**

The people of Israel came to Samuel the prophet demanding he make them a king like other nations. In those days the king usually came from the ranks of the army. Even in Roman times, men who proved themselves on the battlefield became emperors. A number of presidents in the USA have come from a military background- not to mention kings of England. Soldiers, at least in ancient times, had to be strong and ready to fight the enemy. So it was that the first king of Israel, although chosen by the Lord, was a handsome and a head taller than any other man (1Sam 9:2). But when it came to choosing a replacement king, the Lord told Samuel not to consider man’s physical appearance or stature but to consider his heart (1Sam 16:7).

Samuel of course, could not see into a man’s heart, but the Lord can. We have to put men under oath to tell the truth, and even then do not know if they are telling the truth. Detectives search hard to find all they can about a suspect, trying to work out their motives, but clever men can hide the content of their heart. The Lord however, sees clearly the thoughts and intents of the heart. He saw in David a man after his own heart (Acts 13:22). When Samuel anointed David king, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and dwelt in his heart.

David would later write, ‘Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer’ (Ps 19:14). He knew that the Lord knew very thoughts of his heart. In another psalm he asks the Lord to ‘Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxieties and see if there is any wicked way in me’ (Ps 139:23,24). Rather than trying to hide things from the Lord, David asked the Lord to search his heart. In searching his heart, the Lord would find any sin, but also find anxieties and worries; David knew that the Lord could help him deal with these things. When you go to a counsellor you have to tell them your worries and concerns before they can help you. They will not be concerned about your sin, although this may be leading to your anxiety. They will simply tell you not to feel guilty.

The Lords knows when your love for him is not whole-hearted. Isaiah rebuked the people for coming to worship, probably all dressed up, carrying their sacrifices and offerings, and loudly singing, but with hearts far removed from the Lord (Isa 29:19). Jesus used the words of Isaiah to condemn the scribes and Pharisees of his day (Mat 15:8-9).

**3. Jesus**

Jesus saw Nathaniel even when he was not actually present. But it was the fact that Jesus saw into his heart that moved Nathaniel to declare, ‘You are the Son of God, You are the King of Israel’ (John 1:49). Nathaniel was very sceptical about Jesus until Jesus said he was ‘an Israelite in whom there is not deceit’ (John 1:47). John goes on to tell us that Jesus himself was sceptical about many of his followers and, ‘did not commit himself to them, because he knew all men’; ‘He knew what was in man’ (John 2: 23, 24).

If the incarnate Jesus knew what was in man, how much more does the risen Jesus know what is in us. He knows our hearts from top to bottom; yes even the deep recesses of our hearts where we have hidden secret sins or deep hurts. The wonderful thing is that, because of his great love demonstrated in his death for you on the cross, you can unburden yourself to Jesus and find forgiveness for your sin and healing for your hurts; the Lord is full of mercy and grace (Heb 4:12). Write a book and share your sins and sorrows with the world if you want, but only the Lord Jesus can help you start a new life. Only Jesus can give you true peace and eternal life.

**4. Paul**

The Bible uses the word ‘heart’ to refer to the seat of our emotions and the place in our person where we make decisions. In ancient times this place was thought to be in the abdomen, so we find the Hebrew word ‘bowels’ or ‘kidneys’ being used. We know that our brain is involved in decision making but we dare not tell ourselves that this lump of flesh is telling us what to do. We often hear of the mind-brain problem, but nowadays people want to blame their DNA and brains for their conduct and their sin.

There is no ‘problem’ if we read and understand the Bible. When God breathed into us the breath of life we became human beings made in the image of God. We are not driven by instincts; we choose how we respond to things in this world, and to God’s revelation in particular. It ironic and tragic that humanists are trying to make out how clever animals are while reducing human beings to being creatures of instinct.

The word ‘heart’ refers to our mind; we are whole persons. Paul associates the word ‘heart’ with ‘mind’ in Philippians 4:7: ‘The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus’. He goes on to tell us what we are to think. As human beings we can control what we say and do, but controlling our thoughts is not so easy. It depends on what spirit is dwelling in our hearts, the spirit of Satan or the Spirit of Jesus. When we believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit changes our hearts, and takes control of our hearts. We are able to think on things that are pure and holy, as written in the Bible. Jesus said that out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, etc. (Mat 15:19). So we must get a new heart if we are to have pure rather than evil thoughts, and are to live righteous rather than evil lives.

The Christian religion is like no other in that the truth of the gospel, the truth of Jesus dying the cross for our sins and being raised again for our justification, fundamentally changes our hearts. Hindus and humanists cannot explain the change that takes place when a person is born again. They think it is magic or a brain transplant. Other gods, man-made gods, do not see into people’s hearts, and are powerless to change a human heart. Worshippers perform all sorts of rituals and sacrifices but these do not change the heart, of themselves or their gods of wood and stone.

As true Christians with a new heart, we can and we must do the will of God from the heart (Eph 6:6). We respond to, and serve, the living God, the God who knows our hearts and who graciously forgives our sins and gives us a new heart, a heart of flesh to replace a heart of stone (Ezek 11:19). The day is coming when your heart and my heart and all hearts will be revealed before the holy God. God says, ‘Know that I am he who searches the minds and hearts’ (Rev 2:23). Only people with a pure heart will see God (Ps 24:4, Mat 5:8).