

Hearts turned to God Part 2

God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, loving, merciful and holy. The creator of this magnificent universe – We know Him as Father!

He knows the plans he has for each one of us. Within us are great longings that can only be satisfied in Him. He wants our hearts to turn to Him.

I talked recently about the life of Hannah. She turned to God and wept as she prayed to the God of heavens Armies. She believed in a real God, in a real heaven and the angelic host of heaven.

Hannah did not let her natural circumstances, as desperate as they were to her, drive her away from God. She turned to God in her time of need and in doing so, God was able to bring about His plans and purposes through her. She was able to give to God the very thing she desired most.

During this time, all was not well with God's people. Sure enough, life was going on as normal, but normal life for the majority of the population was life without any thought for God. Even the priests had no regard for Him, living to gratify their own selfish desires and lusts.

In 1Sam 3 we read the priests (Hophnie and Phinius) had no respect for God, they are described as **worthless men**, they defiled the offerings, took the best of the offerings for themselves, seduced young women and they were thoroughly corrupt.

No matter how prominent or important people may appear. If you live for yourself, in God's estimation you are worthless. All our worth is in Him.

John Elderidge –

"If Christianity does not take your breath away, something else will"

We all have longings, don't we? People will find any number of ways to fill these deep yearnings and desires however it's only in Christ that we find true satisfaction and worth.

The bible often calls it "thirsting" and "hungering"

Matt 5: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness"

Time and again God's people **drifted** away from Him, and often learned the hard way that **a godless life is a treacherous path to tread**. We never drift towards God!

We need to be deliberate about prayer, devotional times and meeting together. Encourage one another, and all the more as the day approaches.

I want to pick up the story again in **1 Samuel 3:1-10 (NKJV)** Our attention now turns to the young boy Samuel.

In those days there was no widespread revelation. You can't listen to God whilst choosing to live a godless life. The people had stopped listening to God.

Can you imagine how difficult it would be if the people you loved the most stopped listening to you, turned their backs on you every time you tried to talk to them? If they then went off to do all manner of things to offend and upset you?

Scriptures tell us that despite His people rejecting Him time and again, God is relentless in His love and desire to restore relationship. He was prepared to die for us for this very purpose.

In this account he found a way through a child who was an open channel to hear God speak.

1 Sam 3: 1 *"Now the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord..."*

The New Living Bible replaces the word **"Now"** with **"Meanwhile,...."**

I love that little phrase **"*meanwhile*"** It reveals to us that God is working behind the scenes, hidden from our sight.

We can get wrapped up in the day to day, consumed by the worries and concerns of life but one day heaven will be fully revealed. we will understand the futility of things we valued so much and realise the true worth of our relationship with God.

A silent heaven is not a sign everything is okay. It's the exact opposite! We should be searching our hearts if we are not hearing God. God is not the problem, it's always we, who wander off and He, the great shepherd who draws us back.

But isn't it amazing that His eternal plans are worked out through little insignificant individuals like you and me? People willing to serve, to offer themselves as living sacrifices for a greater purpose.

There is always a "meanwhile" with God. He is always working to fulfil His plans and purposes. His eyes range throughout the whole world seeking out those whose hearts are fully towards Him.

It's the wholehearted not half-hearted that God can and does use in His purposes.

We need to keep our lamps trimmed and the oil topped up. All was going dim in this account, the candles were fading and God came to Samuel.

Jesus is coming back soon and we need to be ready. We must watch and pray and stay alive and sensitive to God's Spirit.

Luke 17:26-30

"When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah's day. In those days, the people enjoyed banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat and the flood came and destroyed them all. And the world will be as it was in the days of Lot. People went about their daily business - eating and drinking, buying and selling, farming and building - until the morning Lot left Sodom. Then fire and burning sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. Yes, it will be business as usual right up to the day when the Son of Man is revealed."

God is a loving Father and longs for intimacy with His children. He does not want there to be an uncomfortable silence, but relationship. Yet sin has and always will cause separation.

(Jesus cry "why have you forsaken me" shows us the price God was prepared to pay to restore relationship. Jesus took all our sin upon himself so that we could come freely to God - He was prepared to die to break the silence)

What if a nation turns away from God? Generation after generation turning their backs on righteous living? What does it take for multitudes to turn back?

The account in 1 Samuel 3 shows us how **God used Samuel, one individual** whose life was dedicated to God, to show Israel they had wandered away from Him and as a consequence were at the mercy of their enemies the Philistines.

Had God abandoned them? Never! How could God abandon the very apple of His eye?

When people turn from God, little by little the very fabric of society crumbles. People become selfish, greedy and lustful with all manner of ungodliness. The institutions of marriage and family are eroded, even the sanctity of life itself is questioned and truth is replaced with lies. People put their trust in the creation rather than the creator. It may take a while to realise, but eventually people start to ask, where did it all go wrong?

We tried to live our lives without God.

The simple answer is sin and the remedy repentance. Turning back to God.

We must never under estimate the power of repentance and forgiveness in all relationships

Confessing our sins to one another, taking off the mask of falsehood and praying for one another brings healing. Repentance and forgiveness breaks the strongest of all Satan's strongholds in our lives.

Change in nations begins with a work of God in the lives of individuals with willing open hearts that turn to Him in prayer.

Each of us carries within us the treasure of God. The very answer for those who have wandered away from God.

Phil 2:13 *"For it is God who works in you both to will and do for His good pleasure."*

Do you realize that our lives can be gateways through which God can pour out His blessings on others? As we open our lives to Him, He can flow through us like open channels.

Cornelius was such a person – an individual who opened his hear to God

Acts 10:1-2

"There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion in what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always."

God had prepared the way for gospel to be made known to all nations, through a devout and God fearing family.

The Holy Spirit came and filled them before Peter had even got fully into his message!

V44 "While Peter was still speaking these words the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word."

I'm sure there'd be a lot of preachers upset to have their message interrupted so rudely! **But God came.** Isn't that what really matters? Surely this is what we all long for?

Habakkuk 3:2

"O Lord, revive your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years, make it known..."

Isaiah 11:9-11

Nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for as the waters cover the sea, so the earth will be filled with people who know the Lord. In that day the heir of David's throne will be a banner of salvation to all the world. The nations will rally to Him, and the land where He lives will be a glorious place. In that day the Lord will reach out His hand a second time to bring back the remnant of His people."

Jesus said, ***"if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me."***

John 12:32

We are to hold up the name of "Jesus Christ" as a banner of salvation to the world and the nations will rally to Him.

Surely we are to wave this banner. Testimony of the life transforming power of His name! A people who forgive, as we are forgiven, who serve, as He served, who love one another with the love He has demonstrated to us.

1 Sam 3:2

"One night...."

We see a picture of settled routine. Another night. The end of just another day, with nothing out of the ordinary.

But God has not forgotten his words to Eli, His plans for his people and His call on Samuels's life.

Just another day? There's no such thing!

The purposes of God are often out of sight. Don't be deceived, today is not just another day. **The choices you make today affect your tomorrow!**

God wants to reveal to us, His purposes. Revelation is not a once in a lifetime experience. It does not stop at salvation, it begins there and our lives depend upon God revealing Himself to us day by day.

1 Sam 3:7 *"Samuel did not yet know the Lord....."*

He had been ministering before the Lord, yet didn't yet know Him. Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than going to McDonalds makes you a Bigmac. God has to open your eyes and to reveal Himself to you.

Disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Luke 24:31 *"And their eyes were opened and they knew Him."*

It seems incredible that we could have Jesus, Himself, with us and not know it? That it's possible to preach about Him, listen to all manner of messages, read books, attend church and hear the truth about Him, yet not know Jesus Himself.

These disciples had spent a truly blessed time with Jesus that day, but could have gone away that night, never certain it was Him. Why? Because their eyes were closed and this is the condition of so many today.

We can know the burning heart when in church, silent prayer or bible study but we need come to the point these disciples came to **“and they knew Him”**. Everything is found in that.

We don't come to a dead Christ. The women came to anoint Jesus dead body but were asked, “Why do you seek the living amongst dead?”

“A dead Christ, we have to do everything for, but a living Christ does everything for me!”

The disciples could have been content with their new found understanding of scriptures and that Christ must rise from the dead, after all they had a great feeling of their hearts burning within them and a joy and excitement at the possibilities. The burning heart soon however grows cold after a time.

When we see Jesus, everything changes and life takes on new meaning and purpose. It's no-longer just theory, but now reality kicks in.

I mentioned at Discipleship Explored last week about a man who had the same person drive into his house twice. It appears the man had a blackout while driving and drove through the front of the house into the living room. The reconstruction and decorating took about 10 months to complete. About 11 or 12 months later the same man again blacked out and drove into the same house!

When the owner was asked what he thought, he replied; If I had known it was going to happen again, I would have used cheaper wallpaper!

You see, what we know, changes the choices we make about life.

If we know Jesus himself, it changes our whole perspective on life. We live differently.

Andrew Murray

“Jesus, reveal yourself that we may know You, Yourself. We ask not only to drink of the living water, we want the fountain. We ask not only to bath ourselves in the living water we want the river. We ask not only to know thee, who has touched us and warmed our hearts and blessed us, we want know that we have the unchangeable Jesus dwelling within our hearts and abiding within us forevermore.”

Who is it Jesus reveals Himself to in this way?

“Those who forsake all and follow him”

Those who put God first, who do not rest until they have it.

The disciples were not content with a blessed afternoon and then move on. They compelled Him to come in.

Andrew Murray

"If it's possible to have Jesus every day, every hour and every moment in resurrection power in my heart, shining within me, filling me with love and joy – if that is possible, I want it."

Jesus is able now to keep in the closest fellowship with every believer throughout the whole world.

It's the very presence of Christ that calms the storms and gives us peace. When He comes, He gives us power. Our strength comes from Him and not from ourselves. He gives us His Spirit so we don't have to rely on our own strength any more.

1 Sam 2:18 **But Samuel**, though he was only a boy, served the Lord. He wore a linen garment like that of a priest.

"But Samuel" – are you going to be the exception in your workplace, family, school, college or whatever? But Rob & Gill, but (Name)

It may have been tempting for people to look at Samuel and say "Ah, isn't that sweet? He's wearing a priest's costume! He's like a mini priest.

But no, He served the Lord from his childhood and God saw him and at the appointed time spoke to him.

We often get it the wrong way around. We want to wait for God to speak, before we serve, but God speaks to those who are serving.

V21 "The lord continued to appear at Shiloh and gave messages to Samuel at the Tabernacle."

God had found someone who listened to Him. His words were now going out to all the people. How wonderful! "God is speaking". "Come listen this prophet of God. Isn't it amazing!"

We all love to have warmed hearts, but how are we responding to the word of God?

We have endless broadcasts, books, meetings, social media, YouTube etc. Yet, is there more fruit, more service, more revival, more growth, more power and a demonstration of the Love of God in our communities?

The teaching of the word far outweighs the fruit but why? What's going on?

There are a number of reasons I could give. Impurity, disobedience, pride, etc.

Are we keeping ourselves in the love of God, by responding to His word and is prayer central to our own lives and our life together as a community? ***"If you love me you will obey my commandments."***

Prayer takes on board everything we have heard from God, parcels us up with the will of God and sends it back with the message "Yes, Father, I'm in".

1 Samuel 4

And Samuel's words went out to all the people of Israel.

Notice it says "Samuel's words"

Samuel was speaking the word of God but the people heard Samuel's words.

The people weren't really listening. Judgement had started in the house of God, but now the word was going out to all the people. God was speaking now, but no-one was listening.

Trouble was brewing. The philistines made war with Israel defeating the army, killing 4000 men.

The Elders asked "Why?"

Why this great defeat?

They came to the conclusion, they needed God's help. They were right!

They thought however that this was a simple task and that the mere symbols of God's presence would be enough.

"Let's bring the Ark of the covenant of the Lord"

The problem was, they had broken covenant and God had no intention of fighting for a godless people. They would be fighting their own battle on this occasion. We don't get God to join our side, to be in our gang! We join His side. He invites us and we accept or reject His invitation.

If the loss of 4000 men sounds a lot, it was nothing compared to the losses of this next battle. 30,000 are killed and the ark is captured.

There is now a very great outcry and the crisis predicted by Samuel now comes to pass.

The Philistines thought they could place the symbol of God's presence at the feet of their God. A trophy of victory, the spoils of war. Israel's God defeated and mocked.

But God showed up!

1Sam 5: 6 "Then the Lords heavy hand struck the people of Ashdod and nearby villages..."

"When the people realised what was happening....."

V10 "They are bringing the ark of the God do Israel here, to kill us too..."

V11 "Great fear was sweeping across the town."

V19 Ark returned and again Israel judged for lack of reverence, looking into the ark.

1 Sam 7 Samuel now speaks to the people. This time the people have ears to hear the word of God.

All these things had happened, not because God was harsh, judgemental or unloving, but because people had turned away from Him and were reaping the crop they had sown.

"If you are really serious about wanting to return to the Lord, get rid of your foreign gods....."

Determine to obey only the Lord and He will rescue you.

A very painful journey, but God turned a nation because a broken woman found favour with God. She dedicated her child to the Lord and he in turn found favour with God. This is a picture of what Paul writes about in

Romans 12:1

Offer yourselves as living sacrifices to God....

There are battles to be fought, lives to be saved, fields to be harvested. **But we will never get to the harvest fields if we ourselves have a love affair with other things.** There is no problem with the harvest. Jesus says it is abundant and white, ready to be brought in. The problem, he says is with the harvesters. We have to pray for them (us!) to go into the harvest field.

We are to be godly people amongst others.

Spurgeon listed the godward qualities of effective soul winners: -

They are qualities we can all attain to.

- Holiness of character (Live unto God)
- Spiritual life (Out of his belly will flow rivers of living water)
- Humble spirit (thinking rightly about ourselves and realising our need of God)

- A living faith (God's word says it so I believe it!)
- Great simplicity of heart (All for God's glory not to glory in self)
- Complete surrender of yourself to God. (Not about your cleverness but what is God saying. An instrument in God's hands)

People don't just want our words and our preaching at them. They want to see God cares. How will they see?

As we share our very lives.

1Thes 2:8 *"We loved you so much that we shared with you, not only God's good news, but our own lives too."*

As we share our lives others will begin to see the very nature of God in us.

So God changes communities through the little and insignificant ones who are joined together in Him. Those who lay their lives down as living sacrifices to make Jesus known. All glory is to God when hearts are turned.

We are the body of Christ, His members connected to and guided by Jesus himself so that others may also experience the love of God.

If I be lifted up I will draw all men unto me.