

# West Side Fellowship

## A New Beginning

*In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David. In his twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles, carved idols and cast images. Under his direction the alters of the baals were cut down; he cut to pieces the incense altars that were above them, and smashed the Asherah poles, the idols and the images. These he broke to pieces and scattered over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them.*

*2 Chronicles 34v3-4*

Over the last few weeks we have looked at how pride infects the different areas of our life, bringing with it a hardening of the heart, the deadliest of spiritual cancers that leads to a spiritual deafness towards God, a deafness that will block us from being able to be led by the Spirit and acting as true sons and daughters of God (*Romans 8v13-14*). This week we will start to look at how we turn things around, restoring and renewing our relationship to the way the Lord would want it to be.

Of course one of the strange things that always happens when challenged on a subject like this is that in our pride we instantly claim that all is well. However, if all was well, if we truly walked according to the Spirit and had nothing left to improve, then in our pride we have raised ourselves to the level of Christ, without truly realising what the life of Christ entails. Even the great apostle Paul, after all he had been through and the incredible revelations God had given him still admitted there was work to be done in his life (*Philippians 3v12-14*). He recognised that he had not finished the race and that is was something that he would have to strain and struggle to attain. If Paul still had plenty to attain, I'm sure we have more. In reality the fact that we become so defensive when challenged is because we don't want to admit the truth about the prideful lie that we live, proclaiming to be more than we are. It's a spiritual embarrassment that we do not live up to what we proclaim and do not know the Lord in the way that we should, in other words we are living in conceit.

*"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. "Rabbi, I want to see."*

*Mark 10v51*

I always have to smile when I read of the encounter between blind Bartimaeus and Jesus. There is a blind man crying out and when he approaches Jesus, Jesus asks him what he wants? At first you would think Jesus was stupid, does the Son of God not recognise a blind man when he sees one? Yet the question is very relevant to us for the question has to be asked: What do we want? Bartimaeus, knew he was blind, he recognised his need. Yet if he was healed, life as he knew it would totally change for certainly he wouldn't get much money begging if he got his sight back. Being able to see would mean a complete transformation of his life bringing about a change in just about every relationship he had.

As Christians we have to ask: "What do we want?" Do we really want a relationship with the Father

or do we just want a ticket to heaven. Do we really want to know the Lord, to meet with Him and hear what He has to say? Or do we just want someone to deal with our complaints and who will run around after us to make life how we want it to be? This question is crucial at this point because if we are going to go about this half heartedly the relationship will fail.

*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.  
Jeremiah 29v13*

*“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”  
Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”.  
Matthew 22v36-37*

As we can see, loving God with all our heart is something that is a foundational requirement for knowing the Lord. As we read about the events on the day of Pentecost, one of the key events to notice is in *Acts 2v37* when the people who heard the word were cut to the heart. This is where true repentance and turning to God starts from, a change of heart direction. It's not an emotional state, although it may generate emotion at times, rather it is a heart felt desire and goal for which sacrifices will be happily made. When my daughter was ill in Birmingham, often we would have to travel once or twice a day. It cost a lot of money and the rest of life was cast aside because we had a hearts desire for her. At times that meant being tired and frustrated, we certainly didn't walk round with big smiles on our faces, yet the sacrifice continued to be made because there was a loving hearts desire that came from sacrificial love that was greater than our love for ourselves. This is the sort of love that Jesus talked about, a love that put the Father right in the centre of all we do, just as He has done for us as we see in the true message of the cross.

If we read the famous passage on love in *1 Corinthians 13v4-8* we see that true godly love is humble and sacrificial. It is not about us, but about the one we love, the one we have a desire for. Too often in our modern churches we want a different type of love, a love that puts our feelings front and centre, a love for God that is only pursued if we feel good about ourselves first. It is interesting that the first attribute listed is patience, for if we are going to “wait” on the Lord we may be waiting some time (*Psalms 40v1*), but that patience in itself is a demonstration of our heart felt love and desire and if we are going to hear from the Lord it is a requirement, not an optional extra.

It is at this point we need to look honestly at ourselves and assess the true state of our hearts desire, to ask the Lord to show us the truth, although if we truly have a heart after the Lord the Holy Spirit should already be convicting us. If the Holy Spirit is not able to convict us then our hearts truly have become hardened with pride. As we wait on the Lord, as we allow the Holy Spirit to speak and our eyes are opened to the truth, we may not like what we see. And if our ears are opened to the truth, we may not like what we hear. For as we move forwards in the Lord it is the life of Christ that will start to be replicated in our lives, not warm fuzzy feelings, but a true dying to self as we follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Do we want that? Or like so many before us, will we turn back to the world out of the love for self? For scripture tells us that many disciples turned back and as we read in the epistles, others in the church followed them back into the world, the ways of Satan (*1 Timothy 5v15, 2 Timothy 4v10, 1 John 2v15-17*).

Have our hearts become so set in their ways, that we refuse to change? Let us be honest, the older we are, spiritually and physically, the more set in our ways we become. Again we can make our

excuses, but what we are displaying is stubborn pride. It is amazing how often Christians will talk of a desire to want to grow closer to the Lord, yet are not willing to change their lives in any way.

In our opening passage we should note that Josiah was only eight years old and yet despite all his privileged upbringing he was able to humble himself, and though just a child, walked in the right paths. How was this possible? Simple, because he sought the Lord (*2 Chronicles 34v3*). Through seeking the Lord, not only did it purge his own life, leading to a walk of obedience, but as we see within a few years it overflowed into his leadership of Israel. Starting young was an advantage as he had not had time to make his own paths, yet for each one of us, no matter how long we have been saved and no matter how old we are in this world, the Lord is waiting if only we would allow the Holy Spirit to cut us to the heart.

So often the thing that stops us moving forwards in the Lord is the thought of the things we will need to give up, the sacrifices and changes that will need to be made. What we need to understand is that when we think that way, what we are really saying is that those ways are the true love of our lives and they are more important than our love of the Lord and so we stay put, worshipping our favourite idols.

It is why we see new believers lives change so quickly when they first meet with the Lord. That first love catches hold of them as they rejoice in their new found relationship with the Father. Things of this world are easily cast aside in sacrifice as the passion for the Lord burns within. That change does not come from rules, it is the overflow of the relationship. Yet as that relationship grows cold, as it starts to just become another part of our lives and our progress slows down. We take pride in how far we have travelled, not realising that we have stopped. We may be learning more, yet our time with the Father himself in prayer has grown cold. No longer is the Lord able to move as He did, no longer does the zeal to be led of the Lord burn within, we become like the church in Ephesus, full of action, yet cold in heart towards God (*Revelation 2v4-5*) with a spiritual light that is slowly deminishing.

The call to repentance, is not a call to give stuff up. It's a call to once again set our hearts on the Lord, to desire Him. If the love is there we will willingly sacrifice the time and effort, if the love is not there, neither all the rules in the world or all the books and messages a church can offer will make any difference, for our hearts desire is set on another.

So as we humbly examine ourselves, the painful question we need to ask ourselves is "What do we want?"

*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

*Philippians 3v10-11*