

~Other Speakers M-R: Alan Martin:

Psalm 78:5-8 states, "For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments: And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God." Four characteristics of this not to be imitated generation are given here: they were stubborn, they were rebellious, they set not their hearts aright, and their spirits were not steadfast with God.

That their hearts had not been set aright was clearly seen in their response to the various trials God designed to "prove" (reveal) their hearts. A heart set aright is wholly devoted in unshakeable trust; therefore, when trials and tests come to prove it, the response is always thanksgiving and prayer. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication present your request to God." Any murmuring, complaining, fear, or anxiety reveals that our heart has yet to be set fully aright. We all know that we are to do everything without complaining, to do everything without arguing that we may become blameless and pure children of God.

Consider all the ways the wilderness generation's responses revealed that they had not set their hearts aright. When they were caught between the red sea and the Egyptian army, they murmured. When the Lord allowed them to go three days without finding water, they grumbled. When the provisions of food that they had carried with them out of Egypt began to run out, they complained. When they grew tired of eating the bread of angels everyday, they protested. When they were forced to wait 40 days for Moses to come down off the mountain of God, they appointed a new leader and made themselves another god. When they were tempted by menacing maidens to offer sacrifices to Molech, many ran headlong into the trap and 23,000 died in one day. Every murmur, every grumble, every doubt, every protest, every disobedience, proved again and again that they had not set their hearts aright and that their spirits were not steadfast with God.

Some would be sympathetic to their plight and appeal strongly that they were simply "weak"; after all, the pain of desperate thirst, the dizziness of extreme hunger, the threat of total annihilation, are not common adversities. Yet, God's testimony of them, through Asaph, was that they were stubborn and rebellious. We understand stubbornness to be a resistance against all efforts to be persuaded; therefore, this generation was stubborn in that it continually resisted God's attempt to enable them to set their hearts aright and develop a steadfast spirit with Himself.

It was God who told Moses to have the people turn back so that Pharaoh would be drawn out of Egypt. His design was both to reveal to the people their unbelief and fear, while at the same time gaining glory for Himself through a display of might so great as to inspire faith even in the weakest heart. Did the people receive the faith imparting grace that God's glory afforded them? Indeed not; the tambourines had barely stopped rattling before the people began to notice that their water was running out. You would think that the God who could part one ocean, could easily provide another; however, their response to thirst revealed that they had not received His grace in their Red Sea deliverance. In every test their response proved that rather than receiving by grace the faith that He was seeking to set their hearts aright by, they instead stubbornly resisted in murmuring and complaining unbelief.

If we have begun to see their stubbornness, what about their rebellion? What were they rebelling against? They were rebelling against the very One who was attempting to lead them to the land of milk and honey. They were rebelling against His Spirit's attempt to win their heart's trust. Despite deliverance after deliverance, miracle upon miracle and mercy upon mercy, they stubbornly decided that God did not know what He was doing, and that bondage in Egypt was safer than battle in the Promise Land. God was finally brought to the end of His patience by the generation who continually provoked Him to anger. He declared His own faultless opinion about them: "How long will this people provoke me? And how long will it be ere they believe in me, for all the signs which I have showed among them?" Nothing provokes God more than stubborn resistance to His every attempt to set a heart aright through grace imparting faith. Nothing gives clearer indication that hearts have not been set aright than our response to trials and temptations.

The Lord has made it clear that His desire is for our hearts to be set aright and steadfast with Him in unwavering faith. A heart set aright, and a steadfast spirit counts it all joy whenever it is faced with trials or temptations. A heart that has been set aright will always respond in believing confidence that the God who has proven Himself faithful every time before, will once again be faithful. In the face of adversity, a steadfast spirit will sing, "There is no shadow of turning with Thee, Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not." This steadfast confidence manifests itself in continual praise and thanksgiving. It has come to the realization that the Lord has designed trials so that patience can have her perfect work that we can be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

A heart set aright is a believing heart that rejoices in God's design to teach us obedience through the things that we suffer. Paul had set his heart aright, and therefore declared, "I will boast all the more gladly in my infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake." A heart set aright has been won over by the

Hearts Set Aright and Steadfast Spirits

grace of God, and declares with Joseph, "You meant it for evil, the Lord meant it for good to bring to pass this day to save much people alive." Joseph's spirit had been made steadfast with God, and he realized that his own painful suffering had all been for his brothers' salvation. Hardship had not left him bitter, but blessed.

Nothing reveals that our hearts have not been set aright more than a brother or sister's evil thoughts towards us. There is no pain as keen as the wound from a friend, and no instrument sharper than a brother's accusing tongue. "Reckless words pierce as a sword, and a man that bears false witness against his neighbor is a maul, a sword and a sharp arrow." Under these God sent adversities, hearts that have not been set aright are revealed, and spirits that are not steadfast toward God falter in the heat of battle. A heart set aright blesses when cursed, responds in kindness to abuse, and prays for those who treat it spitefully. Rather than an emotional outburst of flesh, it manifests a spiritual steadfastness of faith.

Are we undone to see the true condition of our hearts? Can we say with Isaiah, "I am a man of unclean lips?" Wherein can we obtain a steadfast spirit with God? There is balm in Gilead! God has made a remedy! There is something so steadfast that it never fails, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning." Only the love of God, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things; only His love never fails. Wherein can we obtain this steadfast love of God? This love is "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit."

In order to know this love that surpasses knowledge, we must be strengthened with power through His Spirit in our inner man so that Christ can dwell in our hearts by faith. When the very love of God, Christ Himself, is dwelling in our hearts, His love constrains us. Then and only then are we steadfast, because the very One who changes not has set our hearts aright by His presence. When we know the love that the Father has for His Son, and have come to know and depend on the love God has for us, then we shall know a perfect obedience and a steadfast spirit with God.

When Christ's presence and power has set a heart aright and made a spirit steadfast, a marvelous transformation occurs. A consciousness far beyond our own capacity, one that surpasses human reasoning begins to guard and guide our every response to adversity. Then, when we feel the piercing of a brother or sister's tongue, we find ourselves far more conscious of God's thoughts towards them, than we are of their thoughts toward us.

O to be like Thee, O to be like Thee
Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou Art
Come in Thy fullness
Come in Thy Sweetness
Stamp Thine own image
Deep on my heart