

The Shepherd's Heart

A pure heart

The well-known Welsh hymn Calon Lan is all about the worshipper seeking a pure heart. In essence Calon Lan means pure heart. The whole premise of the hymn is that as sinful people we have to seek a pure heart from God as there is so much that is impure within. Not so our shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. He never had to sing Calon Lan, for His is a heart that is pure through and through.

Jesus taught about a pure heart

On the mountain, with a multitude before Him, Jesus taught what we know as the beatitudes. These are eight statements which speak of the blessed state and character of those in His Kingdom, those who are His sheep. One of these statements is, *'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'* Only those who are pure in heart shall ever attain to seeing God. What a privilege for such people. They are truly happy indeed.

In addition, He taught that such a heart is not attained by outward rules or rituals. It is not the outward that cleanses the inward, but the inward that cleanses the outward. Jesus tackled this from the opposite angle of defilement, when His disciples were accused of being unclean because they did not adhere to the Pharisees' humanly constructed washing laws. We find this episode in Mark chapter 7. The conclusion of the matter is found in verses 18 to 23, *'So He said to them, "Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?" And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man."'* It is the heart that needs to be pure if the rest of the life is to be pure.

A pure heart is a necessary and good thing.

Jesus possesses a pure heart

This is a wonderful truth. The good shepherd is also a pure shepherd. He not only teaches and sees the importance of a pure heart, but he also possesses a pure heart Himself.

In terms of Jesus being a shepherd, we have thought much on what Psalm 23 says. However, the following Psalm is also a great Psalm concerning the Messiah, culminating in the Messiah's rapturous entrance into glory. In verses 3 to 4 we

read, *'Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully.'* As the promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ can ascend into the hill of the Lord because he possesses a pure heart and clean hands. There is not one spot or stain upon Him. All through His earthly ministry, no one could rightly pin any sin upon Him, because of His purity of heart. Therefore, He was able to lay down His life as a sacrifice without blemish before the Lord, that sacrifice was accepted and He ascended triumphantly into glory.

Purity of the shepherd's ministry

All this means that the ministry of the shepherd towards his sheep will be completely pure. His ministry will be faultless.

If we take Psalm 23 as a whole, we see that the shepherd is committed to blessing His people. As He is pure, we need not worry about the motives behind this, wondering whether He is in it to, "Fleece us," (Sorry!!!!) or has other devious motives. No, we have faith in the fact that He desires to bless us, because that is His good and sovereign purpose for us, according to His grace.

Furthermore, when our shepherd speaks to us these words in Psalm 23, we can take them all to our hearts, because the purity of our shepherd's heart means that He does not lie. In our society we are acutely aware of lies. Lies seem to underpin the precarious fabric of our culture. It is hard at times to take things at face value. However, with the pure heart of our shepherd, we can always trust what He says. Therefore, when He declares that goodness and mercy will follow us all our days, we can be sure that He means it, and that it will happen. Circumstances and challenges may come our way. The evil one may whisper doubts in our minds. However, nothing will stop the shepherd giving us the goodness and mercy we need.

Finally, in the light of the pure heart of our shepherd, as we follow Him, He will lead us in the paths of righteousness. He will never lead us in wicked or impure ways. Rather He will only lead us in pure ways. These are the ways that are best for us. These are the ways that will bring good to us. If we return to Jesus' teaching, these are the ways that will bring us blessedness in terms of seeing God.

Conclusion

So, let us be encouraged by the truth of our pure shepherd. Let us believe His word, trust Him, and faithfully follow Him in the paths of righteousness for His glory.