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Sermon preached by our Pastor

on Thursday Evening

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Lesson. Luke 11. vv. 1-28.

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us. Acts 16. vv. 14-15.

Just to mention at the outset, this may well prove to be the continuity of our spiritual meditation from yesterday at Providence Chapel, Cranbrook. The Text, verse 9, you will be conversant with. The frustration and perplexity the apostle Paul had known was immediately relieved, and the Lord appeared to him in a remarkable way by a vision, when he saw a man of Macedonia beckoning to him, as it were, and giving him an earnest entreaty to come over to Macedonia and help them. To make one reference, you know the blessed response of his soul to this revelation of the will and purpose of God. After he had seen the vision, "immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them."

So we may well say, as we mentioned at Cranbrook, "Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia." 'With a straight course' is a nautical ^{term} which means sailing before the wind. If we take up the reference, it was;

"Come, Holy Ghost, and blow

A prosperous gale of grace." (294) So there was that prosperous gale of grace, and everything in providence and in Creation seemed to be in complete harmony: they sailed before the wind and with the sweet influence of the Spirit to their objective. From what a small beginning, a little company of gracious women by the river side,

and how appropriate was their meeting place for prayer! They "spake unto the women which resorted thither." The whole of the language suggests that the Holy Spirit had been poured on the little company there as the Spirit of grace and supplications. When you think of the river side, the tranquil waters of the river of God, the river of His love, a realisation of His grace, mercy, and favour! and it is so now. Those who are favoured by God meet by the river side where the living waters of the gospel gently glide.

The Lord being the divine Author of the whole matter in pursuance of His decrees, see the vast issue! If God is the Author of a thing, if He begins it, O the blessedness of the issue! Think of the issue: the dear, precious character, the vantage ground there, he occupied by divine grace in the ministry; then the maid with a spirit of divination, and later the remarkable conversion of the jailer and all his household, and the founding of the sweet Church at Philippi which was such a joy and crown to the apostle. It is my design, by the help of God, to come to the beautiful, informative, sacred language used by the Spirit concerning her; namely, "whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."

The first thing is obvious; the heart. I want to inquire into the meaning and importance of 'heart'. What is the heart? Let us give a few illuminating references to the heart. Everything really relates to the condition of our hearts in the sight of God. The apostle Peter said to Simon Magus; "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God." (Acts 8.21) How solemn! God looketh on the heart. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." (1 Sam.16.7) And the prayer of the Psalmist; "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me." (Psa.51.10-11) And the Beatitudes; "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." (Matt.5.8) What is the heart? I understand that the term 'heart' is used over nine hundred times in the Book of God, and it hardly ever refers to the heart in a literal sense,- the organ of the body. So I want to know what the heart really is.

The heart is the inner man, the true man, the real man. The heart is

the seat of all the emotions, affections, exercises, desires. Basically we need a new heart. In Ezekiel the promise is; "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." (chap.36.26) It is obvious that of all the millions of people in Great Britain, and alas that it is so! there must be a vast majority in relation to God who have a heart of stone. The Churches are empty, the Bible is not read: men love sin, evil, Sabbath desecration, immorality, permissiveness; and whatever is spoken, seen or known it appears to have no effect because to God the heart is as a stone. Feel a stone, speak to it: there is no impression, and through the fall, the heart of man is as a stone. I recognise that a child of God feels this, but in regeneration the Lord removes the heart of stone. In a moment of time when He regenerates a sinner He takes away the heart of stone and gives a heart of flesh. That is why you feel to be in trouble; you are distressed concerning your sin. You smite upon your breast, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Sadly, even those who have a heart of flesh mourn sometimes and possibly frequently over a hard heart. You say; "How can this be harmonised?" You would never have the capacity to feel or discern what you term 'a hard heart' if the Lord had not given you a new heart. A heart of stone never mourns. A heart of flesh mourns over the condition developed through carnality, idolatry, unbelief, worldliness. Yours is not a heart of stone because you mourn over these things. Ask the Lord to dissolve it, to break it. The Lord gives a heart of flesh to His dear people, and it will be obvious to you He has given you a heart of flesh sometimes, Why? Because of the motions you feel rising in your soul. "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" (Psa.42.2) At times under a sense of His sufferings you find yourself broken-hearted at His dear feet, and as I felt yesterday afternoon, you know in a moment when the dear Lord draws near. You have His sweet presence; your heart is melted in love, praise, wonder, adoration, gratitude. There is the satisfaction that He is with you still: you are not alone. Where there is one soft heart there are others. This seems to be spiritually contagious. I can say to night, looking ^{back} on the last two years of the lives of two eminent brothers, J.K. and H. Popham, I did not seek the favour but I enjoyed the favour of seeing them both once a month or six

weeks. I never saw them in those last two years of their lives without feeling a soft heart: it was contagious. Their hearts and my heart were soft. The Lord was there. To the end of my life this will be one of my sweetest memories. If a minister has a soft heart it is not long before someone else feels it; and if you come to the House of God with a soft heart it is not long ^{before} the minister and others feel it. So these are blessed evidences. For instance, you can walk into an afflictive chamber and in the twinkling of an eye be so broken-hearted by the sweet influence of the Spirit you cannot speak. You may know what it is to wake in the night and the Lord is there to speak to you. You see the dawn of morning, and before you are fully conscious you know the dear Lord is by your side; He is with you. What about your heart? It is well-nigh impossible to define the heart. It is wonderful to discern and know you have got a soft heart, a tender heart.

There is another aspect to name to you, and I am sure it will concern and exercise a number of us. I refer to the basic solemnity that man by birth has a heart of stone, and there is something else to name. That is why I read the Lesson where I did. In that ^{place} the Lord speaks in synonymous terms of the heart as a palace, and there ^{is} a strong man armed keeping the palace. To translate, this means in the heart of an unregenerate person the devil resides. Satan is there: he has taken up residence. He took up residence from the time the child was born, and he is there in control and he has got all his armour. All the doors are bolted and barred and he is in residence. Is that true? He is keeping his goods. Does this exercise any of you? There is only One can do anything, and that ^{is} a stronger than the strong man: it is our blessed Lord. There is the strong man armed keeping his palace with all his weaponry, and this is where some are, - it may be those we love and pray for. This is the condition of God's elect before they are regenerated. Satan is in residence. You go to a house; Satan is in residence in the heart with all his armour, and he keeps his goods. He is the strong man. You say; "With all the parental manifestation of affection and devotion, surely this will have some effect." Not until a stronger than the strong man comes. This was with me before the service began because it describes the condition. There is hope in it to me. Why? Cannot we say; "And such were some of

you"? We were in the same place. "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified." (1 Cor.6.11) But such were some of you. It makes me think of the vigil of godly parents. The Lord knows all about it. I can name the vigil of some parents who never went to bed till the boy or girl was home, perhaps at three or four in the morning. What does it spell out? This definitely: "when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth the spoils." Do you realise that Christ divideth the spoils? This is a wonderful thing. He will enjoy the spoils of His victory. You think of what He gathers and gains when Christ casts him out! This word to me is a ray of light, hope, and a blessed incentive to prayer. When you were young, and young parents you never knew what you would come into. Talk about being deceived in some things! - not in the strictest sense of the word. As you know, before adolescence, the time of development, many children can be and are sweet. To spell it out, they may speak of the service and the House of God and the ways of God, and you take it and think the Lord has begun. There is a work of grace in the heart and they are taken in hand, and you have expressed to friends that you are convinced the Lord has commenced. Where is it to day? It is not for me to judge, but I have made mistakes myself. I thought there would be a zephyr breeze and they would sail quietly along, and some have, blessed be God. In other cases it is as if all your hopes are dashed, and you wish you had never said a word. You are not absolutely deceived, because in those cases where you believe God has given you something you will never be deceived. To me there is a ray of light and hope. A stronger than the strong man armed comes. What does He do? He casts out the strong man, and as we read, He taketh from him all his armour and divideth the spoils. The vital thing is the Lord casts him out: the devil does not come out of his own accord. If he does he will go back. It is the Lord casting out the vile usurper. There is a new heart, and the Lord takes up residence there. Did you know? Christ takes up His residence there. He sends His Spirit there, and the Spirit never leaves the heart as the Spirit of regeneration and sanctification. The Lord is there. That is the name of the city; "The Lord is there." (Ezek.48.35) Take every child of God in the congregation; all the Lord looks on and

knows. He has given you a new heart of flesh, and the Lord is in your heart, and He never allows anyone else to claim it.

This will bring me further. Do you believe Christ dwells in your heart by faith? Under the law of God, under condemnation you could never feel or say He was in your heart, but the Spirit of God is in the heart when you are brought to the place where you are a poor, lost, guilty sinner feelingly, and you are stripped of everything. There is something marvellous takes place. We may refer to what took place in the beautiful temple Solomon built according to the divine prescription from David his father. One thing was needed. How many of you hope you have it? Presently the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant carried it to the Oracle and the house was filled with glory. This is it. We could use another term and speak of it as the personal Advent of Christ to your soul.

"Enter with all Thy glorious train,
Thy Spirit and Thy Word." (366)

Christ comes with all His glory to your heart, and the Holy Spirit has prepared it and your soul is filled with glory. What about it? Ponder this. This heart has been opened: there is access to this heart. It has been opened by conviction, opened in regeneration: opened by God, for God; opened by conviction of sin, by the blood-dipt dart. But especially this heart has been opened. What opened the heart? What dilates the heart? It is opened by the Holy Spirit as He commences and exercises all His holy graces for you to receive and welcome the Saviour. Years ago, it may be thirty years, some of us will never forget Mr Lockey in prayer at this table. His words have been sweet to me;

"We bow as sinners at Thy feet,
And bid Thee welcome to our heart." (952)

This heart is open.

What is it bars the heart, as bars, bolts, and pins? Unbelief, ignorance, superstition, darkness, deadness. The heart is barred and locked, and this can happen to a child of God by degrees if they have got an idol, or if there is deterioration by carnality, lust or pride that tends to block the heart. So there is conviction, sweet repentance, all

the holy graces and virtues of the Spirit, especially love divine and a large measure of faith, and the heart is wide open to Christ and His gospel. Is yours? You know the effect of divine love. I do well. The Lord did all this for Lydia through Paul. Her heart was wide open, and she received Christ into her heart. This heart has a capacity to welcome and to entertain Him. Did you know? And this heart is wide open to the Church of God, to the commandments of the Lord, His precepts, will and ways.

And "she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." She attended: she did not neglect; she was exercised with these things. Love brought into compliance her will, and caused the deed to be done. "She attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."

After the scales fell from Saul's eyes Ananias said; "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." If you have a sweet hope that the Lord has opened your heart, - and He has and does, ask Him to open it wider, to dilate it further. There is room for your heart to expand further. Dilation is a wonderful thing. Ask the Lord to dilate your heart. If you have a sweet hope that the Lord has done it and is doing it, and is further dilating it by sanctified sorrow, trouble and trial and distress, by sanctified chastening, and emptying your heart of all that is extraneous, to make more room for Himself: if you hope He is doing this, and He has opened your heart and is dwelling in your heart^{sc} that you attend to the things spoken in the ministry, in the holy gospel, why has He done it? What is the foundation for it? Because Christ has a heart. The great heart of God I shall speak of: the loving, tender, human, sympathising heart of the Saviour; the heart we pierced. From all eternity His heart was open, and we were in that heart, Amen.