

THE STEADFAST OF MIND

Isaiah 26:1-4

(Part 1 of 2 Messages)

During this past week, two different people shared with me some painful experiences in life:

- * One was about family members who had been involved in Christian ministry, who have been used by God – slowly but surely drifting away – forfeiting their new life in Christ;
- * Another in an e-mail from an MTSer who was greatly distressed because he had just learned that a man of God whom he had looked up to, who had mentored him – was recently found out to have lived a double life behind the scenes.

Have you ever wondered deep down inside: Will I make it to the end of life's marathon race? Or will I be like the runner who runs out of steam half way down the track, the believer who gives up running with Jesus before the end of the race?

Will we keep the faith right to the very end? Could any of us be among those whose faith grows cold? See Matt.24:12,13.

People like the seed that is planted by the sower, grows up but because it doesn't have strong roots, it withers and dies? See Matt.13:18-22.

These questions could make us feel heavy of heart. Discouraged. We might as well give up NOW. "Okay, I know I'm weak."

Yes, these are very real realities. We dare not be foolish and think today: THIS COULD NOT APPLY TO ME! I'M STRONG.

The last thing that any of us would want is to miss the prize of our eternal life in Christ.

SO WE NEED A FAITH THAT ENDURES TO THE END. WHAT IS THIS FAITH?
HOW CAN WE KEEP GOING?

Let's find the answer in God's Word – as God is a God of encouragement and good hope. He longs that His people remain faithful – so He gives us the way to follow. But we ourselves must take heed.

Read and meditate briefly on Isaiah 26:1-4:

- * A prophetic word about a coming day – the day of the Messiah – our day – a day of singing a song about God as the One who is their salvation
- * A message of hope to God's faithful people in a day when the hearts of both kings and ordinary people among the Jews were not faithful to their LORD
- * A promise to the faithful = kept in peace
- * A call to all people to put their trust in God alone

MY THEME TODAY IS: FAITH THAT IS FOUNDED IN A STEADFAST MIND.

I am not referring today “saving faith” = to the faith that we exercise when we first trust in Jesus. A faith that God gives to us so that changes us from being “lost” to being “found”.

Rather I'm speaking about “enduring faith” = the faith that we live by – “The righteous will live by their faith” – a living trust in God that we walk in every day – that you and I will need as we walk through life in this coming week – a faith that will remain steadfast right to the very end of our lives.

The people who have this level of faith are called in the Bible: “the faithful” (Eph.1:2), that is, a people whose life is characterised by their simple trust in God no matter what.

THE PERSON WHO IS STEADFAST IN MIND IS THE ONE WHOSE FAITH WILL
ENDURE TO THE END.

In Isaiah 26, verse 3 we read:

“The steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace,
Because he trusts in Thee.”

Another translation:

“You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you,
whose thoughts are fixed on you!”

So my question to you today is: How steadfast are you in your minds towards God?

Let’s think briefly about what it meant to be STEADFAST IN MIND IN ISAIAH’S
DAY and in the days of the Old Testament people of God.

It wasn’t a simple or easy thing for the Jews to survive as a nation in those days. Their
very geographical location as a nation placed them at the crossroads between extremely
powerful nations in that world.

They were also a very small nation numerically, surrounded by some very large and
powerful empires such as the Egyptians on one side, the Assyrians or the Babylonians on
the other side. Empires that were aggressively seeking to expand their borders, to gain
control over weaker and smaller nations.

The survival of the Jewish nation was always in question – from a human point of view.

Yet they were a unique people – a people who belonged to the Creator and LORD of the heavens and the earth, the Ruler of all the nations. Their only hope of survival had proven to be their God – that He was stronger than the gods of all the other nations, no matter how powerful and cruel their armies were.

And the might of their God, the LORD, had shown itself over and over again throughout their history. They had experienced amazing victories over their enemies:

- * the Exodus – deliverance over the mighty Egyptians;
- * Jericho – deliverance over the Canaanites;
- * the Philistines – David’s victory over Goliath.

Jewish parents were to talk about God’s mighty victories to their children over and over again. The elders of the congregation were to speak about them among the people. And the people were to speak about the glory and the power of God to one another in the congregation of God’s people.

Yes, small in number, seemingly insignificant – yet this people were different because of their God. “Through Him” they could overcome nations far bigger and more powerful than theirs.

The only one thing He required of His people was a steadfast mind in trusting fully in Him.

God sent His servants, the prophets, all the way through their history to warn them NOT to trust in human weapons or wisdom. If they failed to trust in Him, they would reap the tragic consequences in the life of their nation: they would become like any other nation – without His help. They would suffer losses such as they experienced with the destruction of their holy city and temple in the year 587-586 BC at the hands of the Babylonians.

GOD REQUIRED ONLY ONE THING: THAT THEY KEEP PUTTING THEIR TRUST IN HIM ALONE. THEIR MINDS WERE TO BE FIXED ON GOD AND WHAT HE COULD DO FOR THEM.

They were to follow in the footsteps of the great hero of faith, Abraham, who did not waver in unbelief when faced seemingly hopeless situations throughout his life. Such as keeping on trusting in God for an heir/child according to God's promise when he and Sarah were already very old and beyond the age of child-bearing. What was the difference? Abraham believed knowing that God was able to do all that He had promised. And received the rewards of his faith. (See Rom.4:20.)

HIS GOD WAS THE FOUNDATION – AND IN HIS MIND, HE REMAINED STEADFAST IN THE FACE OF IMPOSSIBLE SITUATIONS.

So a true believer among God's holy nation in OT times was a man or woman whose mind was steadfast towards God.

WHAT WAS THE OTHER KIND OF PEOPLE AMONG THE JEWISH NATION OF THAT TIME? Many whose minds were not steadfast or fixed on God.

Outwardly they belonged to the people of God, the Jewish nation, but inwardly, their faith in God ran hot and cold.

Outwardly, they followed the customs and religious traditions of God's people, but inwardly, they were easily drawn away from a sincere trust in God.

When the larger armies of other nations, like the Assyrians or Babylonians, threatened to engulf them in a flood-tide of destruction and terror, they ran to other gods for help – or

to other pagan nations. They reacted in fear. They wavered in their trust towards their God. They worked on HUMAN SOLUTIONS to their problems.

Deep down in their minds and hearts, their real trust was in the power of man, in man's word to help, in man's weapons of war, in man's wisdom. They did not hold on firmly to their faith in God during the difficult times.

God knew their hearts. He knew that their minds were not steadfast.

God calls such people "cursed". See Jeremiah 17:5,6.

WHAT ABOUT GOD'S PEOPLE TODAY? Yes, we are like the OT people of God – a small, insignificant number, surrounded by many who worship other "gods", mostly the gods of this world – money, power, material things, et al.

God's people sometimes are faced with strong and difficult armies that oppose them. But all of us are surrounded by the hidden armies of the kingdom of darkness – and these are the most dangerous of all. We have an enemy who bent on using very subtle ways to destroy the faith of God's people. OUR ENEMY IS VERY REAL. AND THEREFORE, THE SPIRITUAL DANGERS ARE ALSO VERY REAL TO ALL OF US.

So the question each of us needs to ask ourselves is: Do we have A STEADFAST MIND, trusting only in God – no matter what the outward circumstances may be?

There are many in the Church of Jesus Christ around the world whose faith runs hot and cold. Let's consider some examples of believers today who do not have a steadfast mind in trusting in God alone:

- * Christians who appear to have a strong trust in God but only when everything is going well for them. They may have a hidden expectation that God will keep them from all troubles, always make them happy. So when they are faced with difficult and painful situations in life – like storms on the sea of life, it appears to them that God has failed them. And their faith begins to waver. They might even accuse God of not being kind, or loving, or faithful to them – that He fails to answer their prayers. Such people are “double-minded”. Their faith is not pleasing or honouring to God.
- * Christians who focus on their feelings rather than on the solid Rock of their faith = God. When they feel very happy, they easily trust in God. But if they begin to feel “down” or dejected, then they begin to slip and let go of God. And very easily they are swept away in the current of despair as they imagine that God must not be real after all. Their faith is grounded on their feelings, not on the unmoveable ROCK. Instead of fixing their minds on the unchangeable truths of God's character, they focus on their feelings.
- * Christians who demand that they understand everything that God brings into their lives – people who are always full of “Why?” questions – demanding God to give them a reason for every, little problem that occurs in their lives – every little ripple on the surface of their lives. Who unless they understand why or what God is planning to do, they will not keep trusting in God.

Are we like any of these? BE WARNED. DANGER! POZOR!

God is reminding us this morning that in “the evil days” ahead, we are going to be facing an increasingly strong challenge upon our faith. Unless we remain steadfast in our mind towards God, we won't make it!

WHAT IS TRUE FAITH LIKE? WHAT EVIDENCES WILL WE SEE IN OUR LIVES THAT TELL US: YES, WE HAVE IT?

True faith doesn't look at the way things appear or seem to be to the eye of man. Real faith fixes its gaze on Father God, on His unchangeable character – regardless of how dark the circumstances may seem to be, no matter how many injustices there may seem to be in this world.

True faith does not fix its gaze on the problem – small or large. Rather faith is able to see above the dark clouds of life's troubles the One who sits enthroned in the heavens – who is totally in control of all things that happen in the world, including in the lives of each of His children.

THE MAN OR WOMAN OF FAITH REMAINS STEADFAST because their mind is steadfast and fixed on God.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE TO US WHEN OUR MINDS ARE STEADFAST IN TRUST IN GOD ALONE? WHAT ARE THE “BLESSING” WE ENJOY?

Firstly, God rewards His people with a steadfast mind with PEACE – see Isaiah 26:3. Peace in the mind, in the heart, with God, peace that is perpetual, that takes them through the darkest of nights, the most painful of situations, even to suffering because of the faith.

Do you remember how peaceful Jesus was in the boat on the Sea of Galilee? See Matt.8:23-27.

His disciples were in a panic as they faced the storms. They believed that they were just about to drown. They worked so hard to save themselves from the waves and the wind, while Jesus rested so peacefully in the boat. He knew His heavenly Father. He knew that it was literally impossible that His Father would allow Him to be swallowed up by the

waves, and drown. His mind was steadfast – God was God, the God who made all the elements of nature, and who was able to use their fury to bring glory to His name.

Secondly, God rewards His people who are steadfast in mind towards Him with HIS SALVATION. See Psalm 34:6/7, 17/18. God saves the people – the families – the individuals who remain steadfast in mind towards Him. He enters into our lives on our behalf and does mighty things for us, things that are far beyond our power, things that He doesn't do for those whose faith is weak.

And thirdly, He rewards them with TRUE BLESSEDNESS. See Jeremiah 17:7,8. Also Psalm 112:1,7. Instead of being “cursed”, we are called “BLESSED” = truly happy.

But, you say: “I am so young in the faith. I feel so weak. Sometimes I find it so difficult to keep going. I am afraid that one day I will give up running in the race of life with Jesus.”

Dear faithful one – you and all of us are insignificant in the eyes of the world; God's “small people” surrounded by the many who do not know God nor trust in Him. We all face spiritual threats. We are surrounded by those whose minds are given over to other thoughts – who exercise a strong influence over us: parents, work mates, school teachers or university professors, writers, radio or TV commentators et al.

They are MANY, and we are FEW. They are STRONG, and we feel WEAK.

But the Word of God remains true: If our minds are fixed on God alone, if we keep trusting in Him, He will deliver us, and we will enjoy peace.

Our part is to keep trusting in such a mighty and faithful God.

We do not need to be afraid that today or tomorrow, or anytime, God our Saviour will allow some dreadful storm to drown us in the sea of life – IF KING JESUS IS IN THE BOAT WITH US. AND HE IS.

Jesus' disciples did the right thing – they cried out to the Lord for help. At that moment of time, Jesus spoke to them: “O you of little faith”, but they did the one thing that God asks of us: to run to Him, to cry out to Him rather than to keep trusting in our own strength, or running to other people for help.

And in an instant, they were delivered from danger. Jesus stilled the winds and the waves with His Word.

So what are we to do? CRY OUT TO GOD FOR HELP IN THE MIDST OF THE STORM. TO GOD ALONE. Yes, together with other of God's people who can encourage us – but we are NOT to run to others for the help that only God can give to us.

But God is pleased and honoured with an even stronger measure of steadfastness of mind. And we are going to look at that this coming Sunday. God loves to hear the cries of His children who in their weakness cry out to Him – yes, they are steadfast.

God calls us to go beyond the faint, feeble cry: “HELP, LORD, RESCUE/SAVE ME FROM MY TROUBLES.” That's next week's theme.

What's reality? That none of us have the strength to keep running well to the finish line. Perhaps you may think right now: “No, nothing will stop me!” you don't understand. You don't realise the dangers. You can't do it by yourself. The storms of life are sometimes too much for us.

But reality for us true believers – a reality NOT seen by people without God – is that we have a God who is absolutely trustworthy. We have JESUS is in the boat with us, and He is committed to rescue us from the evil one's dangerous traps.

The steadfast of mind, those who trust in God cry out to God in any moment, and they are saved. To them God shows His power and help.