

Bennochy church: 18th March 2018

"She's got a big heart'. Kind, caring. Treats people in the way they should be treated. *'There's a man after my own heart.* ' I can agree with him. He is doing what I would do. The heart has always been seen as something special. In the ancient Near East it was believed that the heart was the seat, it was the very centre of emotion, will and it was where decisions were made. Aristotle identified the heart as the most important organ of the body. For him, it was the seat of intelligence, emotion, and sensation.

The writers of scripture had a similar understanding. The psalmist said, *"Create a pure heart in me, O God, and put a new and loyal spirit in me."* (51:10) So if we are to understand such passages as Jeremiah 31, we need to set aside our understanding of the heart, as a physical, organic, anatomical structure, that just pumps blood around the body. To them it was so much more.

For Jeremiah, the heart is the centre of who we are. It's what makes us tick, emotionally, intellectually and it controls our morality. If you wanted to find out what a person is really like, you searched their heart, and think of the number of scriptural references to God searching the heart. So, if a new relationship with God is to be formed, then it made sense, certainly to the ancient writers, to now describe this in terms of it being written

on the heart. What better place to stamp the imprint of a renewed covenant.

When Israel looked back at their history, their struggle with God as a nation, they understood, that it was the heart of the people that had broken their relationship with God.

Covenants had come and gone, the colour and vitality of the rainbow; it was long passed, and as the nation of God, they had disobeyed his laws and broken the promise to be the light to all nations of the world. No wonder, that the writers of the ancient world had no compulsion, in stating that evil comes from the heart of people. That was how they understood what had happened, and so to build a new relationship with God, what was required, it was a new heart.

The covenant is changing. It is becoming one we are now begin to recognise. It is not now just about creation, nationhood, kingship or land. It is becoming more and more something built on a relationship between God and his people. And at the centre of that relationship, is the heart.

This is one of those amazing passages where things move on. There is a theological shift taking place here, well ahead of its time. The covenant relationship is no longer something to look at or be taught. It is now part of us, inbuilt, and may I suggest, how God had always intended it to be. And quite clearly stated here, that the consequence of a covenant kept, is forgiveness.

In the New Testament, the covenant relationship takes another shift. It is no longer based on just the words of scripture, but now seen in the Word of God, in the person of Jesus Christ.

Witness the incarnation of God, who sits in an upper room, who washes feet and who offers bread and wine to his friends. This is no new covenant, it is greatest expression, of the gift of a new heart. Paul describes it like this, "*Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come.!*" (2 Cor. 5:17)

Our invitation from Jesus is this, "*Here is my body, it is broken for you.*" Amen.