

## Promises, Promises (#2)

### Introduction

- We make all kinds of promises in life, don't we?
  - "I'll be down in a minute... promise!"
  - "I promise to do my best, to serve...." Guide/Brownie/Scout/...
  - "Promise you won't tell anyone...?"
  - "Money back guarantee; absolute satisfaction - and that's a promise!"
- Have you ever made a promise without really knowing what you were letting yourself in for?
  - maybe you said you wouldn't say anything, and then when the person confides in you, you need to tell (eg Child Protection; or more mundanely, a school playground clipe...);
  - or what about wedding vows?
- Joke: "She took him for better or for worse; and he was worse than she took him for!"
- Not that most people don't mean them when they take them:
  - its just that what you are promising is very often bigger and more profound than you have ever faced before;
  - when I married Helen, I didn't know what it would be like to be handed a screaming, colicky baby at three in the morning and told "Your turn!" - for better or for worse!
- In a sense, these are promises that we need to grow into!

### Membership Promises

- And in the same way that it can be good for couples to sit down and talk through again he promises they made:
  - whether that's at a marriage enrichment course, or just in leisurely conversation;
  - going back to the promises we made as we joined the church can be a helpful and enriching process!
- That's what we are doing during these morning services over the next few weeks:
  - as I said last week, roughly one week for each promise, basically, except for last one, which I've split into two parts:
  - one on bearing witness to our Lord;
  - and one on living a life of service;
  - (related, but distinct themes - the last acting as a kind of summing up)

### The Life of the Early Church

- Picture of early church and its life in Acts2
- In a sense an "unreal" picture, since it is a snapshot taken in the hot-house of Jerusalem immediately after Jesus has died and risen; the Holy Spirit has come recently; there are no "old ways" to combat, no entrenched positions - everything is fresh.
- But at the same time that highlights what is critically important in the life of God's people.
  - no extraneous accretions, no added extras getting in the way of what is really important!
- What was it that was at the heart of this new community's life?
  - its lifeblood?
- It was worship!
- Lots of things are mentioned here, some of which we'll come to later in the series;
  - but in the centre is their desire to worship God:
  - that is why they are meeting together (v.46);
  - that is what they were doing as they broke bread together (v.42) - both in the communion sense, and in the sense of simple table fellowship - what drew them together was common desire to worship the Lord for his goodness;

- "they devoted themselves to apostles teaching (Scriptures; sermon), to breaking of bread (communion), and to prayer" (v.42) - these are still today for us the most common elements of our worship together.
- Those phrases about worship being "at the heart of their life", and it being their "lifeblood" conjure up a helpful picture:
  - heart, hidden inside, essential for life;
  - pumps blood round body - but not just any old blood; blood that is freshly charged up with oxygen, so muscles can move and the rest of the body chemistry can operate;
  - if it stops beating, very quickly the whole body dies;
- Other organs you can do without, for longer or shorter periods - but not your heart!

## Worship as the HEART of the Church's Life

- Applying that picture to the church:
  - worship brings us into contact with God, just as the heart draws oxygen starved blood back to itself to be recharged;
  - that is far and away the most important thing we need - time with God!
  - and that energises us for all the other things our life involves, both the explicitly Christian and the apparently secular.
- Where the analogy breaks down is that while we can't stop our hearts beating, we can stop coming to worship.
  - want to get one thing clear: I'm not getting at people who genuinely cannot come out to worship...
  - but if we care about our spiritual health, we will get involved in a spiritual exercise programme!!
  - *(and that may also mean that we will work very hard at providing opportunities for people who otherwise can't or won't come to be in worship - moving pews, good PA, comfortable seats, and tape... - otherwise their not being at worship is partly our fault...)*
- Health promotion adverts a while back: "You can beat the big three - save a life, your own!"
  - same applies spiritually!
  - the "exercise" of regular worship will sometimes feel stale, sometimes it'll be wonderfully refreshing!
  - sometimes you'll learn a great deal, feel closer to God; and sometimes you'll feel that you are merely acting the part!
- That's understandable - its what happens in any training regime!
- But it is the discipline of keeping going, of sticking with it when it is hard, that very often brings the results.
- Have you ever had the experience of routine or habit carrying you through some difficult time?
  - or the converse, when routine is taken away - by illness, or redundancy - somehow life is harder?
- Same is often true spiritually - regular contact with God can carry us through spiritually dry spells too.
- *Danger: surface only.... going through motions - that's not what I mean.*
  - and worship is not just a Sunday only thing!

## Conclusion

- Make regular worship a priority:
  - not simply because it is a duty;
  - but much more because it is good for you;
  - form that habit that will see you through harder times ahead;
  - and look for God to bless, as he did the early church, with a gladness and sincerity of heart, with generosity and love for fellow believers, and most of all

with a deep and joyful love for the Lord himself!

How?

- change in time use - we'll make it a priority to be here
- change in heart attitude - we'll come looking to God to bless us
- change in our faces - look interested! (singing, listening)