The Promise of a Christian worker

"For I have opened my mouth to the Lord and I cannot take back my promise."
Judges 11:35

Whatever may be thought of the wisdom of Jephthah's promise to the Lord, one thing is very clear. To him a promise (a vow) created a solemn, sacred obligation that must be met at all costs. No earthly tie, however dear, could set it aside.

What was implicit to Jephthah, Jesus made explicit for us His disciples. "***If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple."*** Lk. 14:26-27

There it is – inexorable, all-embracing and inescapable. The claims of the Lord Jesus have absolute priority in all my affections – absolute supremacy of heart and life. Self must go! There must be an absolute renunciation of materialism/consumerism – of the world systems and their subtle influences on our way of living.

For myself and for all of us in the Muslim World and all who would totally follow the Lord, this is the standard we must maintain. It is to this promise of dedication that we must respond or face the solemn alternative. ***"He cannot be my disciple. He is not worthy of me."*** Did you make this commitment? Then, ***"I have opened my mouth to the Lord and I cannot take it back"***. The condition is inexorable; the claim is all embracing; the choice is inescapable!

The Psalmist wrote, ***"I must perform my vows to you, Oh God … for you have delivered my soul from death – yes, my feet from falling – that I may walk before God in the light of life."*** Ps. 56:12-13.

A worker is a person who has made a promise. Like Moses, like Paul and like a whole crowd of people down through the ages who did not love their lives unto death, you have made the most decisive choice of life. High heaven heard that solemn promise in the hour of your decision. Heaven must hear it daily renewed. It is our response in the daily routines of life that will determine our response in a crisis.

"I have opened my mouth to the Lord and I cannot go back on my promise." This response must become habitual in the little things if the high resolve is to ring clearly, promptly and decisively in any crisis. We know that such crises are inevitable.

This promise of the worker can only be maintained at a cost to the emotions – by enduring hardship physically and by a spiritual commitment that is irrevocable. At times the pressure to compromise will make the worker feel almost overwhelmed, ***"All your breakers and your waves have gone over me"***. Ps. 42:7 He will discover he is being brought into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings that he may know the power of His resurrection. He is learning, in the reality of testing, that the highway to spiritual blessing and power is through the low way of trial and pressure. There is no crown without the cross.

One area where this pressure is often acutely felt relates to one of the 'hard sayings' of the Lord Jesus that has resulted in many turning back. This is the conflict that comes through divided loyalties – the claims of family that are always with us. We can't say that Jesus never had these claims put upon him. He supported his mother and the family for years and at the Cross His mother was His dying concern. Yet when they sent to Him saying that His mother and brothers stood outside asking to speak to Him, He replied to the men who told him, ***"Who is my mother, who are my brothers?"*** Mt. 12:46-47.

He was emphasising another obligation in His life – that of His anointing and commission. He recognises the claims of family – parents and children – but He gently points out that they cannot override the claims of God. The irrevocable acceptance of this prior claim makes all the difference to our reactions in the ordinary, commonplace duties of life and in all the great choices of life.

Parents can't love their children too much. Sons or daughters can't love their parents too much. A husband can't love his wife too much. But they can let that love influence them too much. The Lord Jesus was tested at this point and those who have experienced such testing can witness how tenderly He cares and supports us in times of pressure and stress.

Jesus knew well that when He came to do the Father's will, the cost would not be merely the thorns and the nails of the Cross. He remembered the word to Mary, ***"A sword will pierce through your own soul also"***. Lk. 2:35 His obedience inflicted great pain on the one most dear to Him of all earthly ties.

So it is our families that we compel to bear the cross of our full obedience to the will of God. Have we faced this? It is inseparable from full obedience; the inescapable cross – the print of the nails – Is the price of obedience***. "I have opened my mouth to the Lord and I cannot go back."***

If this is the cost, it is the witness of all who have gone before us accepting this price of discipleship, that the Lord Jesus is no man's debtor. Let us be afraid lest we allow our love for those we cherish most to deprive them of the ***"hundredfold"***.

"Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life". Mt. 19:29

This is God's promise in response to our full obedience to His claims. It is far better for our loved ones that we are fully committed to the will of God even though they are deprived of our immediate help. This is far better than us modifying God claims on us for their sakes and in so doing depriving them of their crown! No! By yielding the earthly, we gain for them the heavenly hundredfold. When we are in the place of obedience, the powers of heaven can operate on their behalf. Our presence with them is poor compensation for the loss of that!

Finding, following, keeping, struggling,
Is He sure to bless?
Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs
Answer, 'Yes'

So a worker is a person who has made a solemn promise to God. It is the same for everyone who would wholly follow the Lord. Such a worker will feel acutely the claims of family. His heart will be threatened with divided loyalty. He will be tempted frequently and severely to turn back from the call of God. At the time let him firmly and gently resist any demands that will take him outside the will of God. Let the resolve ring clearly, promptly, triumphantly and irrevocably. ***"I have opened my mouth unto the Lord and I cannot go back."***