

Healing and the cross

Twydall 10am 17/03/02

Healing is a large subject and I want to speak about one particular aspect this morning – how our general wellbeing is affected by how we think because this underlies all our desires, our hopes, our fears and, as a consequence, our actions. It is expressed well than anywhere else I know in the Good News Bible Translation of a verse in the Book of Proverbs:

Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts. (Prov. 4:23)

I should explain that is not necessarily a totally accurate translation. There are certain verses in Proverbs where the original text is uncertain and translators have to make a guess at the meaning and this is one of them. Nevertheless, whether the translation is totally accurate or not, those words reflect a profound truth which is borne out by psychiatrists and by human experience. Let me repeat it:

Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts. (Prov. 4:23)

You see, what will affect you most deeply are not the facts of a situation but how you *perceive* those facts. It begins at an early age. A baby reaches out and manages to grab a fork, which it waves about. His mother will immediately take the fork out of the baby's hand. Why? Because the baby could hurt himself with it; perhaps damage his eye. What is the motive for the mother's action? Love for her child. Those are the facts. But how does the baby *perceive* the facts? "I have just found a lovely shiny new toy and mummy has taken it away. She can't love me because if she did she would let me keep it." So the baby screams. His actions have been shaped by how he thinks.

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Unfortunately, as we grow older, this problem doesn't get better, it gets worse. Let me tell you a story. A young husband and wife ran into difficulties early in their marriage, over money. As single people they had been used to spending their money as they wished and they found it difficult to think of it as joint income. The husband, in particular, tended to spend *what* he wanted and *when* he wanted and the wife was becoming more and more resentful. They were both Christians and the wife managed to persuade her husband that they should go and have a talk with their pastor. At the end of their discussions, it was agreed that, for a while at least, they would put all their money into a common pool and they would both agree before either spent any of it. Some of you may think that was rather drastic, but it was a good discipline to get them used to sharing, and it worked very well until the wife began to suspect that her husband wasn't being totally open. She thought that he was holding back some of the money he earned so that it never reached the common pool. She didn't think it was a major sum, but just the thought that he could *do* that made her feel angry and hurt and betrayed. In the end she became so churned up that she went to the pastor and shared her suspicion with him. So, without letting on, when he saw the two of them together, he casually suggested meeting up again, which they did. As he was asking them how they were getting on with the agreed plan, very gently and carefully he led the conversation round to asking the wife if she had any problems with it. She confessed her doubts about her husband's total honesty in putting *all* of his earnings into the pool. The pastor asked the husband if he had been holding anything back and rather sheepishly he admitted he had. "You see," he said, "It's her birthday next month and I wanted to get her a surprise present. I've got all the money safe and sound; I can show it to you." The wife burst into tears, and just hugged him as she sobbed her heart out.

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That principle goes even deeper when we come to our thoughts about ourselves. So many children are made to feel inadequate, unloved and, so their reasoning goes, that must be because we are failures and unlovable. So they grow up with that thought in their minds and they cope in one of two ways. Either they withdraw as much as they can - they may attend a house-group, but they do not contribute because no one would want to know what they think; they are useless, a failure: or they adopt the exactly opposite approach; they seek to dominate or shock by expressing their views strongly and arrogantly in an attempt to prove that they *are* worth something, their views *are* important. It is their view of themselves that makes them falsely retiring or very arrogant.

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As we grow older we become more and more set in our thinking. We adopt *habits* of thought. You will know people who are always critical. They can never accept anyone or anything at face value: the moaners, the complainers, the self-pitiers. But, of course, there are also the happy, the generous, and the encouragers. It is all a matter of how they think about things, about themselves and about other people; and their lives are shaped by how they think. Do you see why I am so fascinated by that text?

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I have taken a long time to get to our subject for this morning – how the cross can make us whole; but I have provided a base on which we can build. I have time to deal with only two aspects this morning. First, how the cross deals with our sin. I am sure that you know the great truth Paul proclaims in his letter to the Romans:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, [Rom. 8:1]

Unless we are in Christ - that is to say, unless we have made Jesus our Lord and Saviour – we *are* under condemnation. We have sinned, all of us. Have you ever said anything unkind? Is there anyone you have not forgiven? Then you are a sinner and God dare not let any sinner into heaven. We may not be quite sure what heaven looks like, quite what it is; but Christians agree one thing about it; there will be no hurt or pain there. In the words of Scripture, God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. If you went to heaven as you are now, it might be heaven for you, but would it be heaven for anyone else with you there? Even God's love cannot *overlook* your sin; sin has to be *dealt* with. Look at it like this. Suppose you have a pet, a dog or a cat, which you love very much. If it has rolled itself in some foul-smelling bog and its paws are black with filth, however much you love it, you will not allow it into your home unless and until it is cleaned up. So it is with you. God loves you desperately, even as you are – but he cannot allow you into heaven unless you are cleaned up.

Scripture tells us that when Jesus hung on the cross, God the Father laid all our sins on him. In effect the death Jesus died, he died for you. **He** hadn't sinned; all through his life he was perfect before God. It was *your* sin he was carrying there. And so, as Paul says,

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, [Rom. 8:1]

I am sure you know that truth about the cross. But that only deals with the past – the sins we have committed already - what about the future? Is it to be an endless life of us going on sinning and repenting and being forgiven? No, the cross deals also with our tendency, our bias, to sin. Paul deals with that also. He says;

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. [Rom 6:1/12]

When Jesus died on the cross he not only dealt with your past sin, he gave you a new life; you became a new person. Paul gives an instruction; he says, “count yourselves dead to sin”. Now that word ‘count’ is a banking term and it means, look at your bank statement, look at the balance you have. A person who has an overdraft of £1000 will live in a very different way from someone with a credit balance of £10,000. At least, I hope he will. Paul is saying,

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Take account of the actual situation, says, Paul. Not only did Jesus die for *you*, *you* died with him. That person you were, who was a sinner, is dead; you are a new person with the Spirit of God in you. The reason why you continue to sin is that you *think* you are still the same old person.

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You do not believe what happened on the cross.

Now, I have to explain something here. I do believe I am a new person, so does that mean that I never sin? Of course not – but I’m getting better. You may think I am not a very good example of a Christian, but you should have seen me when I first became one. I do sin, but always it is because I have forgotten who I am – a new person, a new creation, in Jesus. When I became a Christian I discovered that two things had happened. I became much more conscious of sin – what sin is. Things that I used to do which never bothered me I realised were sinful, so that was new. And, secondly, I found myself uncomfortable in my sin; I couldn’t live with myself until I had confessed it, and tried to repair the damage. Gradually, I found myself more and more becoming aware just before I committed the sin and more and more frequently I was able to stop myself before committing it. In the words of Paul, I counted myself

dead to sin; I thought to myself, “I don’t live like that anymore, I am not that sort of person.”

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The second truth, which I just have the time to share with you, is this. Many people are afraid of death. Well, let me remind you of our Gospel reading this morning. Jesus said to Martha:

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”
[John 11:25/26]

Here Jesus is promising that for those who trust in him, this life is not all there is. There is a continuation of being, and that continuation is far more wonderful than this life. To prove that that is true and not just wishful thinking, Jesus himself died and then rose again. You see, it isn’t that he went straight from this life to the next, he actually died. He went through what we have to go through. What is interesting is that having made this wonderful declaration, “I am the resurrection and the life” Jesus then asked Martha, “Do you believe this?” He knew full well that the truth only benefits us if we believe it. It is what we really *believe* that conditions how we live.

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Whenever you say the creed you state that you believe in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come. But Jesus would ask you what he asked Martha, “**Do** you believe this?” If you really believe it then, surely, you cannot fear death; you believe that you will continue into the next life, more completely ‘you’ than you have ever been. If you *do* fear death, then, surely, you cannot really believe in the resurrection and the life to come. Let me make a suggestion; if you fear death, don’t spend time trying to overcome

that fear, concentrate on your faith. Do you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? What you really think about *that* will determine whether or not you fear death.

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So what about myself? Do I fear death? I think I can say honestly that I do not. I confess that I am a little apprehensive but that is only because it is something I haven't done before. It is rather like leaving a familiar primary school and going to a new bigger school – what will it be like? Yes, there is a natural apprehension, but would anyone really want to stay in the primary school forever? Even with the apprehension, I choose to go on. It seems to me that death is an awfully big adventure; but I believe that Jesus will be there to welcome me. That is how I think, and my life is shaped by my thoughts.