

New Life in Christ – Heads, hearts and hopes

Part 1 Renewed Minds

Rom 12.1-4

Mike O'Connor is the minister of St Andrews Presbyterian Church at Rockhampton. Mike's one of those guys that had a really obvious, or dramatic transformation when he became a Christian.

Mike was living in Sydney as a young bloke. He'd had a pretty troubled family life. I think his parents ended up kicking him out of home.

Somehow or other Mike found himself in North Queensland. In Cairns. I think he was up to no good. Involved in substance abuse. And Mike says. He was pretty much at the end of the line He figured this life was no life. and thinking seriously about ending his life.

He ended up in the Cairns police station. And somewhere along the way - It might have even been at the police station. He came across a bloke by the name of John Langbridge. And John was the minister of the Presbyterian Church in Cairns.

John said to Mike. He said. Come to Jesus. And he'll give you NEW LIFE.

Now, Mike was in a place where it was pretty clear. That's what he needed. So he went to church. Heard the good news about Jesus. And grabbed a hold of that NEW LIFE with both hands.

Mike went back to Sydney. Got involved with church, and some good godly guys.

Now Mike's married with a family. Leading a church himself. Telling others the same thing John told him.

So good to hear a story like that. How God uses people. To take other people. To the new life in Jesus.

But here's the thing. It's not just people in Mike's situation who need new life.

SLIDE – Acts 5.20

In the book of Acts. Where the church starts. When the apostles are teaching about Jesus in the temple. The Jewish religious leaders get jealous because the crowds are going over to the apostles. So they arrange to have the apostles arrested and thrown in jail.

But in the night an angel turns up and opens the jail doors and says what you can see there. He says.

²⁰ ".....Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this NEW LIFE."

And that's one of a bunch of times where people are trying to put a stop to the Christian gospel. But God's determined that it go out.

And jails not going to stop it. And trouble's not. And threats won't. Even death.

Fact. In God's purposes. Those very things are used in a way to boost the signal....of message of this new life.

Because it's not just for bad boy run aways.

It's for everyone. The successful businessman or woman. Needs new life. The respectable family man. Needs new life. The hard working housewife. The rich man the poor man. The blind man. They all need it.

So you have Jesus in John's gospel saying Come to me. To have life.

Even Nicodemus the religious leader. You need to be born again.

SLIDE – HEADS HEARTS AND HOPES

So, amongst other things. The message about Jesus is about NEW LIFE.

And as we're starting a NEW YEAR I thought it'd be worth spending a few weeks thinking about some aspects of this new life.

I've called the series heads hearts and hopes. Because they're the three areas we'll focus on today and the next two weeks.

NEW HEADS. Because the gospel changes our thinking. And I needed a word starting with H to match the other two. That's for today.

And new hearts. And new hopes. Over the next two weeks.

HEADS, HEARTS AND HOPES. That's the plan.

So let me pray, then we'll go straight to Romans 12.

PRAY

Romans 12. 1,2

So we're at verse 1 in Romans 12.

Which is a very bad thing to do. If they knew, I'd be drummed out of the Presbyterian preachers club for jumping in here. Because when you start at chapter 12. You've skipped Paul's glorious gospel explanation.

Where Paul's just explained how hopeless things were without God's grace. How Jesus has suffered for his enemies. How it's a huge gift. How great the love if Christ is. The gift of grace. The confidence we can have.

And he says.

Romans 12:1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship.

The new life needs to be lived in a new way. In a way that's pleasing to God. That's true worship says Paul.

But keep reading to find out how. Verse 2 says.

² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

The new life, and what God accepts as true worship isn't just an outward conformation. To a written code. It's an inward TRANSFORMATION.

Which leads to transformed living.

Right actions. Don't necessarily mean there's been a change of mind and heart.

But the transformation God does in the gospel. Brings your will... into line with God's will. So your actions that flow out..... are pleasing to him.

SLIDE - BRAIN

Now, let me just say a few things to start with... about the mind.

Your brain has something like 100 billion neurons. Which as I understand it. Are the things that send and receive the messages.

The wrinkly bit on the outside of your brain's called the cerebral cortex. And inside that is the cerebrum. The cerebrum's split into two halves. And each half has four particular sections.

And between them you have the capacity for art, language, moral judgments, and rational thought, personality, memories, movements, hearing and memory, balance touch, temperature, and pain. They're just a select few really.

The amount of information your brain can hold is believed to be up to 1000 terabytes. Apparently the potential to remember everything you have ever experienced. The only problem is you can't recall it, but it's all in there somewhere.

Did you know, your brain's so clever - you can't tickle yourself because the brain can tell the difference.

And apparently men's and women's brains are different. Men tend to process better in the left hemisphere of the brain while women tend to process equally well between the two hemispheres.

I'm sure that's why you women can do more than one thing at a time.

The differences explain why women have to rotate the map. While men do it in their heads. Generalising here. The differences explain why women and men are different emotionally and in the way we solve problems. Why we react differently to pain, we communicate differently, even why women tend to be more in touch with their feelings.

The area of the brain that controls mathematical abilities is supposed to be larger in men.

The part of the brain that responds to specific stimuli – like, say, a baby crying in the night. That's larger in women. See, there's the reason ladies. Us guys, we're just not designed for it.

I'm sure the area of the brain that makes you ask for directions when you're lost doesn't exist in men.

That's just interesting stuff.

The brain that either God gave you or that happened as a random chance of uncaused molecules bumping into each other.

Is pretty darn impressive.

And yet.

In the view of its designer. Our brains aren't quite fulfilling their potential.

I mean, we're designing airbus a380's that can take up to 853 people 15000 km around the world in one hit.

We can tunnel under our city starting kilometers apart. And meeting within centimeters.

We're improving eyesight for vision impaired.

We're doing keyhole surgery to unborn children.

We're doing all sorts of really cool stuff.

We can even text on our iphones in church. All sorts of stuff.

But at the same time.

We're falling a long way short of our potential.

Listen to the way Paul puts it in the first chapter of Romans.

SLIDE – Rom 1

He talks about God's wrath being revealed because of the godlessness of men and women.

²¹ For although they knew God, he says.....they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their THINKING became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

There's the link between thinking and actions again.

Paul says the mind renewed by God brings about a life of living sacrifice that brings God glory.

But the mind that's been on the slippery slope the other direction becomes futile. And the behavior follows in that direction.

Slide – Rom 1.22-25

He describes it like a really bad exchange. Because of this futile thinking. We've exchanged the GOD'S TRUTH....for a lie. We've exchanged GOD'S GLORY..... for images of men and birds and images and reptiles. The exchange of natural desires for unnatural ones. In verse 28

SLIDE Rom 1.28

²⁸ since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a DEPRAVED MIND, to do what ought not to be done.

There's a great quote from a man who'd just given his daughter away to be married. Someone asked him. How'd it feel to walk your daughter down the aisle. To give your daughter away? He said. Like giving a Stradivarius to a GORILLA.

And the way Paul describes what we've done with our minds is a bit like that. The minds we've been given to glorify God. Have been mismatched. And misused.

And almost as though this exchange was unknowing. They claimed to be wise he says. But became fools.

IT's strong language isn't it.Futility. Depravity.

I don't think he's talking about reduced brain function here. We're still pretty good and maths and logic and electronics and mechanics and physics and chemistry. But there is a real problem.

Slide – Rom 1. 22-5

And the example he gives is a sexual one where he talks about men and women substituting NATURAL desires for UNNATURAL ones.

Now I don't think that's because he's trying to shock us or say that's the worst kind of sin there is. I think he's saying it because one it's true. In our day and his. So you'll have to say. Yes WE have done that. Even though YOU might not have. But it's a good example of futility in a way isn't it. I mean the exchange of the relationship that bears children. For one that can't. That's futile isn't it?

And more than that, more than the futility, there's a sort of obvious almost deliberate MISUSE going on here. Which is what depravity's all about. Depravity's a particular sort of corruption. A corrupt person is someone who misuses their power or authority or something. And in Paul's example here. Of relations between men and women. Is one where it's I guess blindingly obvious.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to look at men and women and figure out how it's supposed to work.

Yet we've done this switch. So the same mind that can process millions of messages in an instant. That can put a man on the moon. That can work out the

NATURAL POLARITY OF ELECTRONS.....exchanges what's so obviously natural. For unnatural. And says..... what's the problem?

That's the issue. There's some wires loose in our thinking. Or more to the point. We've pulled some wires out.

And that particular example might apply to you or it might not..... But he's got a few more. All mixed up there actions and attitudes.

Slide

Envy, deceit, malice, greed. Insolence, arrogance, faithlessness, heartlessness, boastfulness

Just a short list of ATTITUDES...that come from wrong thinking about God and ourselves.

That lead to ACTIONS that aren't fitting for people made in God's image.

Let me just take you quickly to Romans 8 where Paul puts in another way. He puts it this way. He says.

Slide – Rom 8.7

Romans 8:7 ⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

That's almost a diagnosis of the problem.

It's interesting. They say lots of people who suffer from depression have a physiological problem. In that parts of the brain aren't firing properly. Receptors aren't working properly. Which is why they really do need medication. Not just counseling.

And Paul says. The sinful mind. Can't submit to God. IT'd be really interesting if they could do some test to see if there's actually something physiological going on. He says. It's biased. And can't get out of being biased against God.

IT's hostile.

Which is where the gospel comes in.

Because, see, who did Jesus come for? Was it those who were sick or those who are well?

He says I came for the sick.

Who does Jesus go to the cross for?

Paul says. It was the hostile. It was while we were his enemies. That Christ died for the ungodly.

People whose hostile minds were at work against them.

Telling themselves there is no God. Telling themselves if there was he wasn't doing a good enough job anyway. Telling themselves you just can't know. Telling themselves. He won't really care how I live.

Telling themselves. Whatever. Because they won't, can't submit.

Jesus came for people like us with hostile minds.

To live and think and act how we wouldn't and couldn't

To surrender HIS LIFE.

To give us NEW LIFE. New hearts minds and hopes.

That's the good news of the gospel. Off you go says the angel. What are you doing here in this jail cell? Go and tell people the message of this NEW LIFE.

So in light of his mercy Paul says. Offer your bodies as living sacrifices. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

God's changed you. So BE CHANGED. So don't go back the other way.

Keep being transformed. And your actions will be God honouring and pleasing.

Question is..... how does that happen? I mean...We're at the start of another year. How can you make sure that Your thinking will be improving day to day?

Now of course it goes without saying. If you're perfect already this doesn't apply to you. But if you're not. How do you operate?

Let me just give you some things to start with.

If you're struggling with being content.....what's gone wrong in your thinking?

Are you thinking. God's stuffed up. That you've got it so much harder than anyone else. What's the tape playing in your head? Is it time to change it?

If you're struggling with issues of anger. If you're losing your temper. Where's that coming from? How can you be transformed in your thinking in a way that means your actions will follow?

Or what about this. What about attitudes towards others? Can you really say with Paul those words we heard a few weeks back in 2 Timothy. where he said

Slide – 2 Tim 2.10

2 Timothy 2:10 ⁰ I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

Is that really your attitude to others?

Who have you prayed for this last week? Do you have that concern...or are you really in your heart of hearts self absorbed?

What about materialism? What's your thinking about stuff? Are you generous with what you've been given?

There's lots of perspective we can get wrong in our thinking. Which might make us more materialistic or whatever.

Do you think with that eternal perspective? Or just live for now?

Here's Paul's perspective

Slide – Rom 8.18

Romans 8:18 ¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

That's an attitude. That's a perspective of thinking that makes a massive difference to how you live in the present.

What about unforgiveness? Bitterness?

Are you suffering well....?

And what about this. Do you really hate sin? Or just some sins?

There was a conversation about food a few weeks ago. Cathy was talking to someone. And this person, I won't say who. This person said you know I think I might have some sort of allergy to dairy. But I don't want to find out. Because I don't want to know. Because I love it too much.

That's a fairly common attitude in all of us isn't it? When it comes to sin.

Are you in voluntary denial?

Are you jealous at all?

I'm just throwing things out there.

What about your attitude to change?

When was the last time you read the bible, or listened to a sermon. And it actually changed your thinking?

Are you just too scared?

I love cricket. Watching it. Playing it. But I've got to be honest. When I'm playing the hard ball scares me to death. I think it might be from when some huge kid bowled a hundred miles an hour at me in the nets one day when I was about 12. So even a couple of years ago I played in a game just with a bunch from the bible college. And I'd be out in the field praying please don't let it come out here. And when it did I'd run away from it. Because I was scared.

Is that how you are with God? Do you avoid his word altogether? Switch off in the sermon. Leave the bible on the shelf at home. What's your thinking? Are you hungry for his words. Like David.

⁷² The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.

Is that your thinking?

The Good news of the gospel is that you've already been given new life in Christ. If you've come to him.

And if you haven't. You know where to go. But even if you've already taken hold of that new life. Your minds already been transformed.

If we're honest there's still a fair bit of room for transformation. Good news is. God our Father's in the business of renewal. He's a specialist in transformation. And I think the starting point is to say YES PLEASE. I think it really is that simple.

Be hungry to Be changed.

Ask for it even. Let that be your prayer. Lord please renew my mind. Please get me out of that futile thinking. Please give me the right perspective. Please transform me. So your words don't just bounce off me.

Ask for it. Then do something about it. Here's a few suggestions. I think you need to be a bit proactive. Life's a bit of a warzone. If we're not deliberate about our attitudes. We'll pretty much just catch whatever's in the wind. Or go back to our old ways.

Here's some quick suggestions.

1. Read your bible with that prayer. With that expectation. Lord change me.
2. Have the right role models. People who you can see are great in godliness.
3. Massively important for younger people. But for everyone. Hang around people who are going to make you grow in your thinking.
4. Read good Christian books. What they do is they help you to think about God's word. Point out things you might not have seen. See things from a different perspective.
5. Talk to yourself. Maybe pick some memory verses to help. Get them stuck in your head. Sing to yourself. Hymns or songs. About God's greatness to you. His faithfulness.
6. Talk out loud even. If you're thinking wrongly. I am angry. Why am I angry?
7. Give yourself regular check ups. Maybe monthly. Don't wait till this time next year to examine your own thinking. Check yourself. Make sure you're being renewed.

8. Lastly. Read some good biographies for inspiration.

They're just some quick suggestions.

Let me pray.