

## AGAINST ALL ODDS

### Mind Games

Mind games (Think About what you think about)

There is a story of a man who had a flat tire, on a country lane at night, in the rain. He gets out of the car to change the tire only to realize he does not have a jack in the boot of his car, so he gets back into the car to think about what he should do next.

In the distance he sees some lights and wonders to himself if he should go and ask for help. But as he sits and ponders his situation, his mind begins to wonder. Would the person have a jack? Would they answer at this time of night or even open the door or window to him? Given the circumstances would be a little selfish. They would probably think I am an idiot for not having a jack in the car! Or for not having a mobile phone, or being a member of a breakdown company.

He ponders further, getting a little cross: "Who are they to judge me they don't even know me, and there they are, sitting in judgement over me, probably laughing quietly about me.

So, the man sets off in search of a jack for his car, but as he walks, he gets more and more frustrated. So, the man knocks on the door. He is very wet and miserable, and the man in the house calls out: " Who is it?"

"You know very well who it is, I am wet I have a flat tire and who are you to judge me for the way I live my life, in fact I think you are one of the most selfish people I have ever met, and even if you had the last jack in the world I would not borrow it from someone like you, so I am off!"

"Well good night, do call again...." Comes the reply.

I guess many of us have played the guessing game, thinking we know what someone else is thinking, or how they will respond to a situation. We are all good at thinking up various scenarios of what could happen, worrying or being anxious about situations that will never happen.

My problem is I also have conversations with myself to think things through, so when I talk to my wife about a particular issue she has already missed half the conversation in my head, so I have to fill in the gaps for her.

How much of your time do you spend thinking?

In this confusing world we live in, we need to learn to think about what we think about, which is the title of this sermon. How often do we really think about what we think about?

We cannot control the weather, or how many miles my car will do on a tank of petrol, or who will win the premiership or how long will lockdown to last. One of the only things we can control in our lives are the thoughts we think,

Thoughts are like plans, circling in our minds, we have good thoughts, bad thoughts, those that seem good in the beginning, but turn out bad in the end. We have the choice as to what thoughts land on the runway and offload their cargo into our hearts and minds. We have the choice of what thoughts to ponder on, which situations to meditate on. Our minds have the potential to be full of good and bad thoughts.

Take this cup of juice, the juice at the bottom is our evil thoughts, we can either add more juice to it or more water to it. Water represent Gods spirit, Gods purpose, purity and promise in our lives. If I were to add a few drops of water to the juice a day it would take a long time before the water diluted the squash. I could pour in this whole jug of water, make a mess, but the more water I put in the less juice will be left.

Paul puts it like this

Finally, brothers whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy- think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me – put into practice and the God of peace will be with you.

Paul is reminding his listeners not to just put a few drops of clean water in the glass, come occasionally to church, or pray. No, Paul is saying switch on the tap full blast, fill our minds in whatever way possible with the knowledge of God. He says: 'Whatever is true, noble, pure, lovely, excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. So that we don't give space or time to evil thoughts.

But do we really think about what we think about?

In her book *The Inner Castle*, St Teresa of Avila, in 1577, writing to encourage other nuns in their prayer life, made the distinction in our thoughts between logic and imagination, which I think is helpful when talking about our thoughts.

And Paul is up on the same idea, in the NLT version of Phillipians 4 v8

It says Fix your thoughts on what is true...

The word fix comes from the word 'Logizomai', from which we derive the word logic. In our thought lives we have this battle going on in our minds, between our logical minds and our imagination.

I always remember climbing to the top of the 10m diving platform at the old leisure center, logic said jump, a hundred people have done it before, but looking over the edge, it's a long way down! My imagination said; 'What if I jump and the water runs away before I get to the bottom, how much will it hurt, what if I go down too far and can't swim back up?'

When we are confused and anxious in life, we need to slow down and not let our minds run away with us, allow God and his word to speak to us. Let the logic, the truth of God's word overcome our anxiety. We may feel distant from God, but Gods word reminds us that, 'He will never leave us or forsake us.' We can cast our anxieties on God because he cares for us. God will answer us if we call to him. The phrase, 'Do not be afraid,' occurs 365 times in the bible - to remind us each day, not to be afraid and live in fear.

However, if we allow only logic to run our live like Spock in Star Trek, we become less of who God created us to be, and we will not grow and take steps of faith. People would not have travelled to the moon; invented the lightbulb or cracked the enigma code, if they had relied on logic alone. It was too hard a task to solve, but imagination and creativity gives us hope that things can be achieved, the possibility that things can change.

Proverbs 4: 23 in the NCV says "Be careful what you think because your thoughts run your life"

We have thought related sayings: We may say - I had to think long and hard about this before making a decision. Someone might say of our dreams and hopes: That's just wishful thinking. Or we use to say: 'A penny for your thoughts.'

In 1522, Sir Thomas More wrote (in 'Four Last Things'): 'It often happenth, that the very face showeth the mind walking a pilgrimage, in such wise demeanour that other folk say to them - a penny for your thought.'"

In those days a penny was worth a considerable sum, therefore our thoughts, or the thoughts of a person walking a pilgrimage, were of great value. Not many of us today have time for a pilgrimage, we rush through life, being referred to as the frazzled generation, making rash decisions because we do not take time to think. It's easy to send an email off, but in the past, you had to take time to compose a letter and put your thoughts to paper carefully. The problem today, is we have too much information and not enough time to think.

We heard the story last week of the soldier who took his New Testament and prayer onto the battle fields. No mobile, no internet, no Xbox or Nintendo Switch. Only Gods word and prayer to keep him safe.

I wonder if we would be content if everything were stripped away and we were only left with Gods word, would we be content to fill our minds, meditate and chew over his words and teaching to us? If we think it's all down to us to change our thought life, we will never make it. Paul never made the right choices, he persecuted Christians in the early church, refused to accept or even acknowledge Jesus until he met him face to face.

But what changed in Saul's life? What Changed in Peter's life? Peter, who blundered his way through his discipleship training at Pentecost? Jesus went to Heaven so that the Holy Spirit would come and be our helper and the one who walks with us and guides us each day. We need the Holy Spirit to think good thoughts.

John 16 v13

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

Romans 8 26 v

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Romans 9 v 1

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit

When thinking about what we think about, Paul starts his list with; ‘whatever is true.’ Paul is not wanting us to hold an opinion on whether something is true or not no, he wants us to reflect on real truth.

John 14 v 1

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Paul is encouraging his followers to think on the truth of God’s Word which is unchanging, and Jesus said: “I am the way the Truth and the life.”

Paul exalts his people first to think about truth. We live in this world of fake news and spin, but God and his Word and message do not change. It’s still true today that Jesus died, and rose again and give us new life, we are a new creation. God by his grace has washed us whiter than snow. The truth is, when God looks at us all, he only sees his son and the price he paid on the cross for our freedom.

However, whilst in this fallen world, we are at war in our minds with the devil who wants to steal this truth - that God loves us because he loves us, that we are adopted into his family, and we are a new creation in Christ.

But the devil plays mind games with our imagination. Is all we hear about God and Jesus really true? You do realize that God hates those who don’t love him? No, God is always reaching out to all people, (as shown on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel), but people have convinced themselves in their minds, that Gods truth is not real, and there is a different way to live without God and Jesus in our lives.

It’s hard to hold onto truth, to rejoice always - which is why we need Gods word and the Holy Spirit to counteract all that the devil wants to throw at us. In the wilderness Jesus was tempted and used the truth of God’s word to stand firm against the Devil and to put on Gods Holy armor.

If we are to grow as Christians, we need to meditate and hold onto the truth of God’s word and let the water of God’s word purify us. This is the right thing to do – whatever is right.

Next Paul speaks of what is noble. Noble is not a word we generally use today, or I don't at least. We do associate noble with royalty and nobility. When we come into God's family, we become nobility, we are called a royal priesthood. With nobility comes responsibility, what noble characteristic do you have? What noble characteristics do people see in you that could put into practice?

Paul says: "Let your gentleness be known to all". Noble thinking means acting with - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, qualities we would want to see in a king. Before we act this week, ponder these noble characteristics, and put them into practice.

Whatever is pure. We can struggle to be pure, to think only Godly thoughts, when a Goldsmith refines gold, he knows it is pure when he can see his reflection in the gold. Do we reflect something of Jesus in our lives? Are our motives in life always pure? I have to confess mine are not, and we need to confess our sin to God, who forgives us and does not condemn us if we are honest with him, because he loves us, because he loves us. Grace covers over a multitude of sins.

Think about whatever is lovely, someone sent me a lovely card the last time I preached, which is on my desk to remind me to be strong in the Lord always, mentally and spiritually. Others sent texts and emails. Think about a lovely moment in your life, let it lift your spirits and thoughts.

Whatever is admirable - We all remember, I guess, Captain Tom and his walk! We admire him for doing what he could, and he raised millions. However, we can admire people for just hanging in there. We, as a church, have been a blessing to Crawley and this world for simply doing the admirable thing. How can we think, act and be admirable today?

Whatever is excellent – I think Paul is saying don't give up, give it your best, your excellent best. There is a joy in completing something excellently to the best of your abilities not someone else's.

Whatever is praiseworthy: Best performing teams at work need six times more praise, to one negative comment, to perform at their best. How often do we think about what we think about and before we jump in, evaluate if it's a praiseworthy or negative comment and how the other person will receive this? We should not avoid the difficult conversations but think before we speak.

I would also include thanksgiving in this category, thanksgiving leads to praise.

However, we cannot live in our thought world forever, otherwise we will think and never do. Our thoughts should drive who we are and what we do. In the world we live in, where we get bombarded with information and can be overwhelmed with negative thoughts, we need to think about what we think about. Take Gods word to heart and allow Gods word, to shape our thoughts and actions and put it into practice

And the God of peace will be with us.

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church, live-streamed, by Ian Larkham on Sunday

....