

LOVE WINS

A Beautiful Mind

Ian has entitled this talk a beautiful mind, it's a strange title for a sermon, what is a beautiful mind?

There is a film with this same title - IMDb (Internet movie Database) says of the film: *A mathematical genius, he made an astonishing discovery early in his career and stood on the brink of international acclaim. But the handsome and arrogant Nash soon found himself on a painful and harrowing journey of self-discovery. After many years of struggle, he eventually triumphed over his tragedy, and finally - late in life - received the Nobel Prize.*

I wonder what is troubling your mind most, as we sit here today.

Proverbs 23 v7 says "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Our thoughts often drive our real motives, our thoughts often reflect who we really are. We can put on a brave face in front of people, but inwardly we may be struggling with many thoughts. I know I do, both good and troubling, but its part of who we are. However, God never lets us go beyond his love and grace, even if we think we have.

If we were all to write on a piece of paper our most troubling thoughts, offered them as a prayer to God, put them in a box, and came back a year later, I wonder how that trouble would seem? Would it still be at the forefront of our minds? Would we now have a different perspective on the issue? Would it have gone away or has the prayer for help been answered in a different way, beyond our current understanding.

However, the reality is that trouble is very real for us today.

We are going to be looking at a passage from Mathew chapter 16 from v 17.

We have the hindsight of knowing what happened in Apostle Peters life, his struggles, his harrowing journey of self-discovery, how Jesus met him on the beach. But how did he end up with a beautiful mind, and how we can have a beautiful mind?

Before we start though, I just wanted to give you a little background to the way our brains work.

There are others who are more knowledgeable than me on this subject so I will just briefly touch on it. My organization has just merged with a larger organization and as part of their support to staff, they have an area on their intranet called "People with Possibilities." They have realized, if people are happy in teams and working well and have a more balance life, it is good if they understand how their minds work and how they interact with others.

A key element to our minds, is the limbic system. This sits at the core of our brain and produces our instinctive reaction to life events, it kicks in first - you hear a door banging behind you and your mind and your body reacts producing a fight or flight reaction. Adrenaline is released to enable you to run.

Our limbic system monitors our key needs:

Belonging –a need to be a part of something, a tribe

Status – position and role in a group – One Body.

Autonomy – the ability to make your own choices

Fairness – justice

Expectations – high expectations

Certainty - knowing what is going to happen.

If our mind perceives any of these areas are not met or we are threatened, then the limbic system will react. If we feel are hurt, our minds will start racing. Our brain has a negative bias which helps to protect us. When Ian says: 'How's your heart?' I guess some of us will instinctively think negative thoughts. However, they are just thoughts and feelings not who we are, we need to remember we are sons and daughters of God, loved before the world was created.

It is hard to have a beautiful mind, you may hear news at church or in life and think the worst, rather than praying and asking God for his perspective. In the Old Testament people often enquired of the Lord, to know his mind and his will.

I don't get to preach here that often and some may well think - thank goodness for that - I know there are a couple of other people in Church who may want to do it in the future. Ian has already indicated one will be preaching in the future. My limbic reactions say: I am not wanted any more, will I ever preach again? It creates uncertainty in my life, which is uncomfortable, and my mind

can spiral downwards. Should I stop and think - wow we have a new vision where everyone will be using their gifts in the future, so it's good that others will preach! God might want to use this church plant another church, so we will need more people to preach.

Maybe God has a new gift or a season for me, I have the choice to react positively or negatively, with the possibility of missing out on God's bigger plan and purpose for my life.

We have another part of the brain called the 'prefrontal cortex' which helps us to be disciplined, to think logically and helps us deal with complexity and to make the right choices. It is not as simplistic as the limbic system, and it's not as quick to respond as the limbic system is, so it takes effort to engage it. To make right choices. Thoughts often come into our minds, and we react.

Jesus was tempted by the devil for example: If you are the Son of God then.... Adam and Eve - if you eat of the tree of life, you will surely not die as God had told them. The devil is constantly sowing doubt into our minds. The devil is always actively trying to disturb our beautiful mind,

Jesus does not react irrationally but says: "It is written." Jesus uses God's word to counteract his human instinct. Which is why meditating on God's word day and night is helpful to us in maintaining a beautiful mind.

So, let's read the passage:

Mathew 16 v 17-28

Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' ²⁰ Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Jesus predicts his death

²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the

chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’

²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.’

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

²⁸ ‘Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.’

In verses 17-20 we read how Jesus blesses Peter and how God will use Peter to build his Church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. Then in verse 23 Jesus rebukes Peter and says: ‘Get behind me Satan, you are a stumbling block to me, you do not have in mind the things of God.’ The message says “But Jesus didn’t swerve. Peter, get out of my way. Satan, get lost. You have no idea how God works.”

As much as Peter Loved Jesus he had much to learn about God’s ways and so do we all. Satan tempted him and Peter fell for it. We may think we know God and walk in his ways, but we must weigh things against scripture, people are fallible and can get things wrong.

Peter’s limbic system went into overdrive, he was hurt by Jesus’s bombshell. Peter hoped that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah; that the Romans were going to be overthrown and Jesus would take his rightful place as king and Saviour. And guess what, where Peter would be right alongside him basking in God’s glory.

Peter had given everything up to follow Jesus and knew all that he had hoped, was going to be lost. Peter pulls Jesus to one side “Never, Lord” this he said:

“This will never happen to you.” Peters’ whole life had just been turned upside down and he did not want things to change.

How often do we want to keep the status quo and not be open to the possibility of change and growth? When we looked at the parable of the seeds, even the good soil had to be changed and broken up. But our minds struggle with change and how it affects our lives.

Peter went on a real journey of despair, until Jesus met him on the beach. Jesus restored Peter that day, as Jesus restores each of us into a loving relationship with God through the cross. But if we are to have a beautiful mind we need to move on from restoration to liberation.

If Jesus had not died, scripture would not have been fulfilled, we would not be standing here today and the Holy Spirit would not have come into the world to teach us all things (John 14v26.)

1 Corinthians 2 v 14

“The man without the spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgements about all things, but he himself is not subject to any mans judgement. For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit we have the mind of Christ, the spirit brings truth and love into our minds. Which is why Jesus gave Peter such a harsh rebuke. If we are to have a beautiful mind then we need the mind of Christ through the Holy Spirit, God’s love transforms our minds if we let it.

However, with the mind of Christ comes opposition, the devil will always try and steal our peace and our beautiful mind.

There is a great book which you may enjoy, called The Battlefield of the Mind, by Joyce Meyer if you are in any doubt as to the battle we are in. Jesus does provide a way, to walk with him and to keep our beautiful mind on track.

In verse 24 the message says

Then Jesus went to work on his disciples. “Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat; I am. Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how. Self-

help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for?

I have spent many years trying to find out what God wants for me in my life, trying to sit in the driver's seat, or at least help steer.

Our limbic system wants to question, will I survive another day and what the best options for me are. It does not make sense to me to let go and let God take the driver's seat, but I am learning the hard way the more I let God lead me the more peaceful my life and mind is.

I am leaning late in life if I want a beautiful mind, I must let God lead me.

In verse 27

For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

Each of us are valued, loved and forgiven by God, but we all need the Holy Spirit's help to think the right thoughts. We need to respond to situations and not react to them, to love as Christ loved us. When Jesus comes again God will have a one to one with each of us and reward our relationship with him, and see how we have shown that love to others. How we have played our part in the body of Christ and used the gift he has given us, not comparing ourselves to others.

Colossians 3v 1-2

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

If we are to have a beautiful mind, we need to look up to things above, let God be in the driver's seat, blessing us with the gift of a beautiful mind through his love.

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