

GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

10.8.14

Who do we live for? (Part 2) – Joss Bray

Review of part 1

We talked about Romans 12 where it says we are being transformed by the renewing of our minds and that when we offer our bodies as living sacrifices – that is our spiritual act of worship.

So that includes all areas of our lives – what we think and what we do. Our minds will be transformed to be less conforming to the way the world sees things and more to God's way of thinking. We will know better what to do and what is right and wrong.

We remembered that we are now born again into a different kingdom with a proper king. We are not earthly citizens but heavenly ones. In fact, as we read in Galatians 2 that "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me".

We also noted in 2 Corinthians that "we are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit"

So God is doing this in us – and it is his initiative and his power at work in us through his Holy Spirit.

We also decided that we would rather God be in charge of our lives, than us. The next question then was –

What does it look like to live for God?

At this point, it is easy to get sidetracked and disillusioned. It is a trap I fall into and expect a lot of us do as well.

We see people doing great exploits for God – dedicated missionaries in difficult places, leaders of mega churches, great preachers, amazing givers, stories of great self sacrifice, fruitful evangelists, writers of many books – and so on.

It is so tempting to compare ourselves to others – we must not do this! We have learnt together that the church is a body with many parts. Some seem more prominent than others – however – all have their part to play – so that the body can function properly.

Whether we preach sermons or stack chairs, God has given us roles and responsibilities in the church. Each of us is different and we have different gifts. The point is, it is not *what* we do but *how* we do it that is the most important. God puts us in different places, in different situations, with different gifts to relate to different people – that is his design. When we look at the bible, it doesn't teach that we should all aspire to do the same things – at all.

We are who we are and much loved by God – just as we are.

What it does teach us, is that it is about giving our lives to God and living for him – and the practical outworking of that will be different for all of us. However, when we compare ourselves to others, we either end up feeling inferior or superior to them – and neither of those is right or helpful. It would be like comparing apples and pears – what is the point? The important thing is that they are what they are supposed to be.

It is right to look at *ourselves* though - Paul says in Romans 12:

RO 12:3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. ⁴ Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

So when we ask - what does a life lived for God look like – in practice - the inevitable thought arises – am I living up to this? Is *my* life like this?

Well the bad news is – almost certainly – no. But the good news is in Romans 8 -

RO 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

But as we look at the issues, we should be *challenged* but not condemned. If anything, it should wake us up more to the mercy and grace of God. We stand by faith and the grace of God – not by what we do – although, clearly, good works should follow.

EPH 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

In examining our lives, I suggest three headings that we can look at which will help us to be challenged in an appropriate way – these are – focus authority and security. As we mention them, think about how that applies to you – remembering that it is not about feeling condemned.

Who or what do we focus on in our lives?

To whom or what do we give most time and effort? What do we tend to talk about most? What is in our thoughts most often? What do we spend our money on? What do we love most? Who or what are we passionate about?

For a lot of us – the answer is ourselves and then other things come second and God trails in third place. Even good things can take the focus off God. He is the creator, the giver the author of everything – why do we focus on created things not the creator and on gifts rather than the giver?

Jesus was very focussed on the father and spent a lot of time praying and listening to him and talking about him. He loved the father – his focus was on him. Jesus is our ultimate role model.

So challenge 1 is to focus on God more – to think about him more and love him more and to listen to him more. Let good things point to him rather than focus on the things themselves. Let's not be distracted by the world – by good or bad things. Every day let's make a conscious effort to do it.

Where is the authority in our lives?

So this is about who is in charge of our lives.

For a lot of us – the answer is ourselves, then other people, and then God trails again in third. When we make decisions and plans – is it with the “mind of Christ”? Do we think about what our King wants us to be doing? After all, we are citizens of heaven first and foremost. Jesus did what his Father wanted him to – he was clear on that.

Do we listen to our own inner voice about what we want, or are there people pressurising us to do what they want us to do.

So for example, in the TV programme “Location, Location, Location” when people are helped to find a house to buy – how often do we hear – “we believe God wants us to move here to help with a new church” - not very often... It is more like – “to have a better lifestyle” or “to be near relatives”. Not that those things are necessarily wrong – but who is directing their lives? Who is directing our lives?

Do we recognise the authority of God and want to obey him and to do what he wants us to? And also do we try not to do the things he doesn’t want us to do. – are we fleeing from sin? Are we living under his authority – do we take it seriously?

Jesus did, and he did and said what the father wanted him to:

JN 5:36For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.

JN 12:49 For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.⁵⁰ I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."

He had no problem at all with the authority of the father – why should we?

Where is our security?

For a lot of us, this can easily be the same answer as to the focus and authority question. Do we rely more on ourselves and our strengths, or on God? Do we trust more in financial planning than in God’s provision? Are we more at home in our bricks and mortar homes than in the heavenly kingdom? Are our jobs or savings what we are trusting in to provide for our needs? Does the NHS offer us eternal life?

When you think about it – it is foolish to rely on these things for our security – none is permanent or reliable. Only God is.

MT 6:28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?³¹ So do not

worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Our security is in God and in his kingdom – which is coming – and will last for ever.

What shall we do then?

These are all questions for each of us to answer if we really want to look at ourselves with sober judgement.

A life lived for God will *focus* on him first. It will recognise and live under his *authority*. And it will be *secure* with a firm hope for the future.

If we can get hold of that and ask God to help us in it, then our lives are going to be fruitful and we will be blessed and others will be blessed too. We will not all be apples or even pears, but fruit will be evident. We will become the best apples and pears we can be with no need to compare ourselves with anyone else.

If there is a scripture to sum it all up – this is pretty close:

COL 3:1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.