

We start a new series today and we look at some issues that affect us as just ordinary humans and try and see what the Bible has to say to help, guide and encourage us as we seek to live Christ like lives. We will look at some negatives like doubt and greed but also some positives like growing in faith, bearing fruit. The full list is in the sermon card.

Today we begin with how we see ourselves our self image.

### **1. We have a problem.**

You may have heard in the press this week that the biologist Prof Sir John Gurdon, has been awarded the Nobel Prize (for medicine) for his pioneering work in the field of cloning. You may also have heard that at school he was told it would be “a sheer waste of time” for him to pursue a career in science. Many people have been told that they are no good at things. See if you can guess the people who received these reports “He will never amount to anything,” – that was the view a Munich schoolmaster had of the young Albert Einstein. Similarly one young lady was told that she wrote “indifferently” and “knew nothing of grammar” – that was Charlotte Bronte. Then one teacher warned a young man that: “He must devote less of his time to sport if he wants to be a success – you can’t make a living out of football.” – that was said of Gary Lineker.

Many of us carry the burden of being told we are no good and serve no purpose around with us for many years. Many is the child who has been told he or she is useless so often that they accept it as true. We have a poor self image. We don’t think much of ourselves and we don’t think other people think much of us.

You may remember how back in the Old Testament when God’s people were in the wilderness with Moses he sent twelve spies into Canaan to see if they could take the land and the spies came back and while Caleb and Joshua encouraged Moses to go and take the land 10 of them said, “We saw the Nephilim there. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them” (Numbers 13:33). That is how some people feel. They feel small, insignificant, worthless, incompetent and that others see them in the same light, “We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.” This I would see as a problem many people in general and quite a few Christians have. We see ourselves as grasshoppers and we think others have a negative view of us as well. Is that you? As you listen this morning or as you listen to the download or read these notes is your life affected by a poor view of yourself or by the way you think others see you? If that is the problem then what is the answer to having a poor self image?

Well the answer often given by counsellors and such is that we need to boost our own self esteem. To think better of ourselves and not worry about what others think of us. As Tim Keller writes, “If someone has a problem with low self-esteem we, in our modern world seem to have only one way

of dealing with it. That is remedying it with high self-esteem. We tell people they need to see that they are a great person, they need to see how wonderful they are. We tell them to look at all the great things they have accomplished. We tell them to stop worrying about what people say about them.” (The freedom of self-forgetfulness p26) However, as another writer points out that can create “arrogant self-centred people who are out for themselves”. (Mintle: Breaking free from a negative self-image p19)

I want to suggest this morning that the answer to poor self-image is not to try and build our self-image. It is not to love ourselves more.

In 1 Cor 4:3-4 Paul said “I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court” that is what they thought of him didn’t really matter to him and certainly as we read the letter they didn’t think much of him. He could well have suffered in his self-image by what they thought – but no. However he goes on “indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent.” What he was saying is that he is not even worried about how he thinks about himself. He might think he is innocent but it didn’t mean he was. So Paul’s answer to a negative self-image affected by what others thought of him was not a self built self-image. So what is Paul’s answer? What does the Bible teach us? Paul completed the verse with these words, “It is the Lord who judges me.”

In effect what he was saying is that what matters is not what you think of me nor what I think of myself but what God thinks of me. It was this that was the base of his self-image. So how did God view Paul and how does he view us?

## **2. God’s view of humanity**

### **a. In general.**

It is clear that humanity is highly regarded by the creator God.

**i. we are made in the image of God** (Gen 1:26). Humanity is different from the rest of creation in this respect that we alone are made in God’s image. Human beings are uniquely able to think, choose, create, love and worship God. “God created man as a sort of earthly son, who represents him and responds to him” (Blocher)

**ii. we are the pinnacle of creation.** Again this shows how highly God views humanity. In Gen 1: 28 we see how God said to those he had created, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Humanity was charged with rule over creation under God. Then in Psalm 8:4-5, “what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour.” The unique place of

humanity in God's purposes. And this is reflected in what Jesus said about God's care of the sparrows and that "you are worth more than many sparrows" (Matt 10:31)

Humanity is special and important to God but of course we are fallen. We are people who have rebelled against our creator God and ignored his will and purpose for our lives. As a result we are set at enmity with God and face his judgement. This is true of all people however because of Jesus how God sees us has dramatically changed.

#### **b. In Christ**

Because of Jesus the way God sees us has changed. Paul knew that for himself and for all who are "in Christ". "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor 5:17). In Christ we are new and the way God views us is different. We are no longer fallen creation. In Jesus we have a new identity. In that verse we are described as a "new creation". In Romans 5:10 Paul describes us as those were God's enemies but have been reconciled to him through the death of his son – changed from enemies to friends. Further in Romans 8:16-17 Paul describes the Christians as God's children and heirs of God. This is summed up for us in 1 John 3:1 where John says, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" How does God view the Christian? He sees us as his child. That is you and I. This is our new identity in Jesus, children of God.

What does this mean to us as we think about self-image.

What Paul and John are saying to their Christian readers and to you and I are

#### **i. In Christ we are accepted .**

On Monday during Messy Church I was telling the story of the Prodigal Son. I'm not sure anyone was listening but I was telling it. The son who took his inheritance, turned his back on his Father, wasted all he had and then in desperation returned to his father to find the Father coming to meet him and restoring him as his son. It is a picture of God accepting us as we turn back to him. The failures, sins and issues of the past washed away through Jesus.

I don't often get dressed up and so sometimes I am in danger of pitching up to things somewhat underdressed and feeling a little uncomfortable. Not so with God. With God we are all acceptable clothed in Jesus. Paul puts it like this, "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation." (Col 1:21-22). Can you just look at that for a moment? In Christ you are presented before God holy, without blemish and without accusation. That is how God sees you. Here is God's view of you as holy, without blemish, free from accusation – acceptable to him in Christ.

#### **ii. in Christ we are valued**

If I were to ask how much are you worth I wonder what you would say? If you were Wayne Rooney you might say about £250k per week or Robin Van Persie might say about £22 million as the amount that Manchester United paid for him. Apparently a crash test dummy used in the Plane crash programme is worth £150k. But then some might say I am only worth £107.45 a week that being the basic state pension.

Many people do have a problem with worth. Some one once jokingly said to me “If I was on sale in a slave market I’d be in the reduced section”. They were joking but underneath was a real sense of lack of value. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” Why are we a new creation? The answer is clear in Scripture in that we have been transferred “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves” (Col 1:13). God has transferred us into his kingdom. He has bought us and at a great price, “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19). God the Father has paid a huge price to transfer you from darkness to light, from death to life. The price was the death of his son in your place. Robin Van Persie’s transfer fee was £22 million yours the death of Jesus. This is the value God puts on you.

### **3. So what**

So where does all this leave us? What I am trying to show is that in the Bible what matters it would seem is not what others think of us, nor what we think of ourselves but what God thinks of us. So in the light of that a couple of things:

**a. we need to see ourselves as God sees us.** The way others see us and the way we see ourselves is very subjective and can change from day to day. God’s verdict is objective and unchangeable. God accepts us as we are. God values us highly to the extent of the death of his one and only Son. What we need to see as we look in the mirror is someone who is loved, valued and accepted by God.

**b. we need to accept ourselves as God accepts us.** Yes there may have been bad things in your past as there were in Paul’s. He was the man who persecuted the church and yet could say “I am what I am by the grace of God” (1 Cor 15:10). Accept how God sees you and that by God’s grace you are who you are a sinner loved, valued and accepted by God.

**c. we need to “think of yourself with sober judgement”** Romans 12:3. When I point us to how God views us I am not saying it so that we can puff ourselves up with the idea that God thinks I’m wonderful but rather that we have what Tim Keller refers to as a “gospel humility” which he describes this way, “the essence of gospel humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself it is thinking of myself less.” (p 32). He goes on to explain it in this way, “a truly gospel-humble person is not a self-hating person, or a self-loving person but a gospel-humble person. The

truly gospel –humble person is a self-forgetful person whose ego is like his or her toes. It just works. It does not draw attention to itself. The toes just work; the ego just works. Neither draws attention to itself.”

This self-forgetfulness is there in the great command to love God and love our neighbour. There is no self in that is there? Tim Keller further explains it in this way “Wouldn’t you like to be the skater who wins the silver yet is thrilled about those three triple jumps the gold medal winner did? To love it the way you love a sunrise? Just to love the fact that it was done?” I do recommend this little book by Tim Keller, ‘The freedom of self-forgetfulness’.

Here I think for all of us is a huge challenge for so often everything we say do or think centres around us and affects the way we think of ourselves. God’s word encourages us to have a basic assurance that God loves us, values us and accepts us and then in the light of that to forget about me so that I can love him and love those around me. I can delight in him and who he is and what he has done and I can delight in others who they are and what they have done.

Understanding ourselves is seeing ourselves as God sees us and rather than focus upon my self focussing upon God so that I am not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself but thinking of myself less.