

### Jesus at the centre!

In this, we'll look at how Jesus is central to our faith; why and what we can do to allow God to shape us to be more like him and to then get out there and do the business for God as well as we possibly can!!

#### 1. The power of the Cross

On the Cross, Jesus paid the full price. Derek Prince received a word from God that the work that Jesus did was 'completely complete, perfectly perfect.' There is no provision that Jesus did not make on the cross.

##### **Forgiveness / Healing**

Isaiah 53.4-5: Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

##### **Righteousness**

2 Corinthians 5.21: God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

##### **Life**

Hebrews 2.9: But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

##### **Abundance**

2 Corinthians 8.9: For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. (Amplified extends to say 'enriched, abundantly supplied')

##### **Glory**

Hebrews 12.2: Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

##### **God's acceptance**

Ephesians 1.5-6: he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

##### **Blessing**

Galatians 3.13: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.

We also know that the Old Testament gives us 7 'compound titles' of God, describing it in terms of our needs. God is Jehovah-jireh, the Lord will provide (Genesis 22.14); Jehovah-rapha, the Lord who heals (Exodus 15.26); Jehovah-shalom, the Lord our peace (Judges 6.24); Jehovah-tsidkenu, the Lord of our righteousness (Jeremiah 23.6); Jehovah-shammah, the Lord ever-present (Ezekiel 48.35); Jehovah-nissi, the Lord our banner (Exodus 17.15); Jehovah-rahah, the Lord our shepherd (Psalm 23).

Psalm 23 presents all of these in the one Psalm:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Question – are you walking in the fullness of this? Probably not! But there is good news. Just as faith comes from hearing the Word of God, so God changes us from glory to glory, step by step as we live in him...

## 2. Being at one with Christ

Are you putting Christ at the centre of your life? Are your decisions, thoughts, words and actions fully submitted to him and fully obedient to him? In the army, you are trained to accept decisions and direction without questioning. Why? Because sometimes your life and the lives of those around you depend on you acting obediently, without question and immediately. This is the kind of life that Jesus has in mind for us.

In the Garden of Eden, God created woman from man, he walked with man. When we read in Genesis 1 that the Lord spoke to man, man didn't react with shock so we know that there was an incredibly close relationship between God and mankind. Only sin brought a barrier. God's aim is to create a pure and holy body for him and as a bride for Christ the bridegroom. The purpose of the wedding, like a marriage, is to make 2 things into separate entities that live and breathe as one. The work that God does in our individual lives and as a church is to shape us to become more Christ-like. The book of Ruth in the Bible is not simply a love story between Boaz and Ruth, Boaz is a reflection of Christ and how he has loved us and redeemed us. Ruth is a picture of the church. (Naomi is a picture of Israel). What we see is a union between Ruth and Boaz, reflecting the union between Jesus and his church. In Exodus 20.5, we find the word '*Qanna*' (God). In this context it means God as a jealous God, Israel's husband.

God's purpose is wholeness and completion. But we have a part to play. I don't know about you, but my jacket doesn't jump off me if I want it off, I have to take it off. Hebrews tells us to throw off / put off everything that hinders us. We have to make the choice and then act. As Joyce Meyer says, "God has his part; we have our part. God won't do our part; we can't do God's part!"

Too often we're like the world and people don't see Jesus when they see us. How do we know that someone is for example a astronaut, or a footballer – well, for one thing they

wear the right gear and look the part. But they also do things and make decisions that set them out: astronauts go into space; footballers play in football matches. Note that they don't just say they are an astronaut or a footballer. What makes them what they are, is doing what they say they do. How are people going to know we are Christians if we don't act the part? While we can make decisions, it is Christ who changes us and this is reflected in our words, our thoughts and our actions.

We want to be a church that lives in the fullness of what Christ has done for us. There is a debate on about how few men are in church. One author has written that the archetypal romance novel speaks of a perfect man who sweeps a woman off her feet and loves her perfectly. The classic man's movie is about an all-action hero who fights and saves the world and gets the girl. Very often in our churches we have songs and language that speaks of a perfect man who loves us perfectly. We rarely have fighting talk (in a spiritual sense) or journey together doing things to see God move. This is just a thought and a challenge to us... Are our churches more like social clubs than a military operations centre?

### 3. The Word of God transforms us

Where do you spend your time? David Beckham (soccer player) was renowned for getting to training early and leaving after everyone else. Darren Campbell came into school recently and explained how he even went training on Christmas Day after lunch, and spent months only eating salad to keep a consistent weight – just to be a winner. Wherever you spend your time most will impact you. Whatever you spend your time doing will determine the outcome of life. Your choices have power. So choose wisely...

This is where the Word of God comes in. One survey suggested that many Christians only read their Bible in their own time once a week or even once a year. This is ridiculous and if you are here at church today as a Christian and are not spending daily time with God, then you have to make a change. It is great to go for prayer and to have the support of other Christians, but God is speaking to us all the time. He mainly communicates through his Word. If you don't read his Word, how will you hear God's voice and see God's change in your life. To change a habit, you need to do something until you see a change. The experts say this is 21 days, but keep going. Even if it's painful at first, very soon it will become second nature. You have to make a decision to change and then follow this through. The great thing is that God will give you lots of chances. Better still to hear and obey straight away. Obedience brings blessing.

We must allow God to fill us – one practical application is to let God's Word dwell richly in you (Colossians 3.16) or literally 'live in you' – or start loving others more. Then we can help bring change, transformation, justice, compassion, love and God's grace. How do we do this? Well, we have to make a choice and ask God to change us, very simple. Only trouble is God will take you at your word so be careful what you say!

But it's more than reading the Word, it's meditating on God's Word. Now this is often viewed with suspicion but it simply means reflecting on the Bible and asking God to speak to you, by spending quality silent time with him and listening. Again, this may be hard initially, but God is more ready to speak to you than you are to listen. So if you do listen and filter out the other voices, God will speak. As God speaks, you will be changed. The Bible is a mirror:

James 1.22-25: Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

Every evening I read the Bible and try to read into and behind the text to see what God is saying, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal. I read part of one or two books every day. If that seems too much, I also read the UCB notes (from this year and the previous year) each day. These are short snippets and a great way to get into the habit of reading God's Word. As you grow as a Christian, you need to 'eat' more. You don't simply drink a bottle of milk as you grow older. Hopefully, you don't wear nappies into your adult life... But many Christians are still eating spiritual milk and this has to change. In 1 Corinthians 3.2, Paul challenged the Corinthians church about this, and I'm making the same challenge.

## 4. The change inside

Changed from the inside -> out because Christ is on the inside of us. Any outward change is simply religion and this is where other religions fall down. Only Jesus changes the actual person inside, which is why we, and our nations need Jesus. Anything else is just window-dressing...

When I became a Christian, God took hold of my life. It was quite a turnaround and his work and power in me reflected that change. More than that, my gratitude to what he did and continues to do was also as profound and deep as the change. If worship a response to what God has done in your life, then I've always tried to be a worshipper.

Dying to self is something we've looked at before. It's about Jesus being on the throne of your life. Imagine you are the king on your throne and you choose to get off and invite Jesus to be on the throne instead. I used to wonder how Paul and others did the things they did. Now I see why. He had died to self. Paul was no longer living, but Jesus Christ in the body of Paul was in charge. Not always – Paul had struggles like we all do. But basically, Paul wanted God to be number one in every area, thought and word in his life. As someone has written, Christ lived so that you can live. Paul said, *"I no longer live, but it is Christ living in me."* (Gal. 2:20)

Looking at the Bible, I agree with Derek Prince who says that wherever Paul went there was a riot. Today in many of our churches, the most radical thing we're doing is changing the colour of the cutlery. The gospel is supposed to be forcefully advancing. Often the church is advancing as forcefully as a fluffy little rabbit...

James 1.27 – Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

James 2.14-17: What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,"

but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

There is so much need in this world that we can't be Christ's disciples without doing those things he's called us to do. This isn't out of religious duty but out of the love for God and the change he's made in our hearts. The Heather Small song says, "What have you done lately to make you feel proud?" The song needs to change slightly to ask what have you done lately to make God feel proud? What are you doing about the 2 million child sex slaves, the 1.5 billion children trafficked? What are you doing about the six million under-5s who die of hunger each year? What are you doing to support Christians in places like Eritrea, Iran, China, North Korea, Iraq, Orissa in India and so on who are killed and persecuted for their faith? What are you doing to show love to homeless people in Exeter, or your Christian family in the UK church, or missionaries faithfully serving overseas feeling overwhelmed and not encouraged? Everyone can do something. Don't ever tell me you can't do anything.

One time I had a word of knowledge for a homeless woman. My mom went into town and spoke to her and found out it was true. Since then, they've been in contact and God is at work in her life, the woman even bouncing up to speak to her in town.

## 5. Conclusion

So... Is there anything that is holding you back from following God's best in your life, serving him more completely?

To do this only comes from submitting to God's Spirit and saying yes to him. In Ephesians 5.18, we are told to be "filled and stimulated with the [Holy] Spirit." (Amplified Bible) The word 'filled' means to be continually filled. It is a passive verb, so being filled is something the Holy Spirit does as we allow the Holy Spirit to control us. The word is used like the wind in a sailing ship, moving the ship through water. When we are filled with God, he directs us and we sail wherever the wind of the Spirit blows. The word is associated with being controlled completely by something – in this case by the Holy Spirit. It can also be used in a context of being fully equipped / complete, for every good work. To do God's work fully, we must be submitted to God so that we can be completely filled with God.

It's interesting that in army training, the soldiers are broken down in order to be built back up. In the Christian life, God knows exactly how to break us open to build us back up. God disciplines the ones he loves so if he's working on you at the moment, be encouraged. If you've never experienced being broken down by God, you are unlikely to be used by God in powerful ways...

Romans 6.6-7 – "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin."

This may mean there is a conflict between your old self and your new God self, as Paul says – this is a war that rages inside us all the time. We all have our crosses to bear (places where what we want conflicts with what God wants).

This is the place where God's will and our will meets and we say yes to what God wants whether or not it conflicts with what we want! This is a daily thing, a decision-by-decision choice and a lifetime of growing in the knowledge of God. The result of this process is freedom. Complete freedom. When Nelson Mandela walked out of his prison he was a free man. He moved from being in chains to being free. That walk out of the prison must have been liberating for him. This is the kind of freedom God wants for you and the kind of freedom you need to really live for God.

Some people that say to sort yourself out you need to look outwards not inwards. I agree, but would add a couple more things... We become free when we focus upwards and outwards, with the only inward focus being on keeping ourselves right with God.

"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. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." Paul the Apostle, speaking in Colossians 3:1-3.

Where we focus on Christ, live in the fullness of what he has done, serve him with all our heart, allow him to change us and live for those outside of ourselves, then we will awake the church, a slumbering giant – and turn it into an even more powerful force for good and for God. Amen?

Response Time... Let's pray...