

LIVING WITH A SIMPLE FAITH IN A COMPLEX WORLD

Hebrews 3:1

(Part 2 of 2 Messages)

Introduction:

So how has it been during this past week? Have you kept your thoughts fixed on God? Last week's text was **Isaiah 26:3** **"The steadfast in mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in Thee."**

It's not so easy, is it? So many things happen in our lives these days. We're so busy. So many things to think about.

For that reason, I want to invite you to think with me how we can fix our thoughts on God as we live in a very complex world. I've entitled my message: "Living with a simple faith in a complex world."

How would you describe today's world? "BUSYNESS". Our lives are increasingly full of things we have to do, and things we would like to do:

- working at home or outside of the home
- shopping – buying
- entertainment – have fun
- bombarded with advertising – make your life easier, simpler – buy this or that
- communicating – communication explosion – Internet, e-mail, mobile phones
- travelling possibilities – visiting places, seeing things we couldn't enjoy before

Certainly a more complex life-style than what our grandparents lived. So we ask ourselves: Why do we have so much but enjoy it so little? Why do we have more stress when we have so much to make life easier?

Some years ago, I attended a seminar in Australia for pastors. We were told that the one word that best describes how the average Australian is: ANXIOUS. Anxious about the present, anxious about the future.

I wonder if this isn't also true of most normal people??? Perhaps I should ask you: Is it true of your own personal life? Could it be said that you suffer from chronic anxiety?

What an incredible contrast – we have so much more than other generations, so many more things we can do, so many more things to make life simpler, yet in reality our lives are far more complex. We have more things to think about, to worry about, to captivate our minds, or even to hold our minds in bondage, more problems to solve, more heartaches to drag us down.

So is the solution to find a way to return to the simple life of past generations? That's a dream. Impossible! So what do we do? What should we do?

We cannot run away from living in today's real world. We cannot escape the need to communicate with people in a way that fits today's world.

NO, we cannot escape from the realities of growing up as a believer in today's complex world. But God is with us in OUR world just as much as He was with our forefathers in their worlds. HE has the answer to every dilemma we face.

So then, what is God's way for us in our world? What is God's answer for people who struggle with life in the fast lane – with busyness, anxiety, having more but enjoying life less? How can we have a simple faith in a complex world?

God's answer, God's way is closely linked with our theme for these two Sunday messages: Fixing our thoughts on God. In other words, God's way for His people is to have a simple faith in a complex world – to live lives that are marked single-mindedness – refusing to be distracted by many other things or to fill their lives just with temporal matters. TO FIX THEIR THOUGHTS ON JESUS.

Let us read Heb.3:1.

At first, this might sound to us totally “theoretical” or just something for people who can live in a religious institution, or for pastors and missionaries who can concentrate on “spiritual things”.

We may even feel that it sounds as if God wants us to focus on God – just for His own sake.

When God’s Word calls us to focus our thoughts on Jesus, it is really for our good. How is this possible? Because to fill our minds with thoughts about God, about Christ, changes the way we look at life –our minds are filled more and more with those things that matter most, rather than with the empty and meaningless values of today’s world.

For that reason, God calls us through this Word to become Christ-focused people instead of self-focused or this-world focused people.

THE REAL CHALLENGES

Our text today is taken from the letter to the Hebrews. Let’s ask two questions: Firstly, what kind of world did those Jewish Christians live in (ie those to whom this letter was originally written)?

And secondly, what was the link between their world and this message to “consider Jesus” (fix their thoughts on Jesus)?

- They were Jews and had left their Jewish faith to put their trust in Jesus as their Messiah and King. Many of them would have been treated as “traitors”, or as “outcasts”. They would have suffered much rejection from their family and the close-knit Jewish community. They would have been accused of leaving their Jewish traditions and faith, of rejecting Moses and all the prophets. Their need?

The assurance that their faith in Jesus was a genuine faith, rooted in their Old Testament faith.

- The world in which these Jewish Christians lived was also very stressful for Christians – living in a dictatorship, in the Roman empire – facing threats upon their very lives as Christians because they worshipped a different “Caesar” or “Lord” (Kurios) to the Roman emperor who sometimes deified themselves and made people to worship them. Their need? To cope with the fears and anxieties of living as believers who could be taken off to be martyred for their faith.

So these early Christians also had plenty of hard situations to face as they lived out their Christian faith in a complex and challenging world.

GOD’S ANSWER TO THE CHALLENGES

So what did God through His servant call these believers to do? How were they to survive as true believers under these very difficult circumstances?

He wrote: “Fix your thoughts on Jesus”. “Consider Jesus”.

Meaning: “Look closely into”, “pay close attention to”, “look intensely at” JESUS.

The writer to the Hebrews also uses this same word in Heb.10:24 “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” In other words, pay attention to and look closely at ways to help each another show love to one another.

In other words, for these early Jewish believers, instead of paying attention to the threats of others – their family & community, Roman emperors and governors – they were to pay close attention to their Lord Jesus Christ, to fix their minds and thoughts on Him.

And this would bring them great peace no matter what situation they might have to face.

WHY did the writer to the Hebrews believe that Christians should fix their thoughts on Jesus??? Because He alone is worthy of our highest thoughts. Because He is the greatest! His dominant theme is: **JESUS IS GREATER:**

- **Jesus is greater than the angels** – Heb.1:4. See vs.1-3: Jesus is the perfect Image of God – the exact representation of God’s very nature/character – Jesus was not just a superior human being, but God Himself come among man. Angels are great and powerful, but they aren’t to be worshiped – only Jesus may be worshipped.
- **Jesus is greater than greater than Moses** to whom God gave the Law (hence one the Jews greatly esteemed because they saw the Law as the centre of their faith). See Heb.3:3. Moses is to be revered as a great man of faith, but our attention isn’t to be focused on any man – only on God’s Son, Jesus.

WHO was this Jesus whom the writer called his readers to pay close attention to according to Heb.3:1:

- **God’s Apostle** – the One sent by the eternal God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to announce the Good News of God’s way of salvation, to bring hope to a people living amid hopelessness and fear; and
- **Our great High Priest** – the One who brought His own blood into God’s presence – to provide a lasting atonement for sin – replacing the OT sacrificial laws, rituals and ceremonies. See Heb.2:17,18.

FACING THE SAME CHALLENGES TODAY

Is this same message also addressed to us today? And how does it apply to us in our complex world?

We may face different problems but we also face the very same human problems that these early believers faced. Let us consider two examples:

- **We have the same major human problem ~ our SELF-CENTREDNESS** – we see the world revolving around ourselves, or our family, or our ministries (if we are in the church), or around our church, or around our relationships etc. – so that our focus and our thoughts are so self-centred – what consumes our thoughts so often boils down to our “selves” – our world revolves around our “selves” and our “self” life is often very self-centred rather than focussed on God and upon the Lord Jesus
- **We have the same struggle with FEAR & ANXIETY** – even if our problems are different in some ways to those faced by those early Jewish believers. For example, we struggle with anxiety because our world is full of uncertainty – and also we are often lured into believing that the more we have, the less worry we will experience – whereas the reality is that we have more worries. We face the threat of the growth of the seed of God’s Word in us becoming choked by the worries of this life (Matt.13:22).

What are we to do?

Let’s think of our minds or thought-worlds like a “garden” in which we plant seed. It is like fertile soil. Whatever we plant there will grow to become plants that bear fruit – see Gal.6:7.

TWO MAIN ACTION STEPS – one negative, and the other positive:

Firstly, pull out the weeds, help clean up our minds. This means that we are to “change our minds” (= “repent”) from thinking bad thoughts or filling our minds with “junk” or “rubbish”. To admit that we have all sown unholy seeds in our minds that have produced “weeds” in our lives – that are not glorifying to God nor a blessing to us and to others.

Specifically ...

- By what we have allowed into our minds through the eye-gate – books, magazines, films/movies, TV etc.; and

- By what we have allowed in via the ear-gate – music, stories, words spoken by others, the lies of Satan we have listened to via Satan’s messengers (even listening to followers of false religions, cults etc.).

Whatever we are focussing our minds on that takes primary place in place of Christ is an “idol” that God hates and that will inevitably rob us of the great spiritual blessings we receive by paying attention to Christ – and that makes us guilty of the sin of “idolatry” even if it may be something neutral or good, even Christian ministry or reading can be like an idol. Calls for radical action for our own good!

Secondly, sow or plant good seed in our minds. And in our text tells us that the good seed (best seed) are thoughts on JESUS. HOW do we do that?

- **Plant the seeds of truth about the Person & Life of Jesus in our minds by frequently meditating on God’s Word that reveals Jesus to us.** Study and reflect deeply (= feed one’s soul and mind on) upon His beautiful and perfect character as it is seen in His words and in His works & deeds.
- **Feed your mind on Jesus throughout the day by seeing yourself walking through the different events of daily life together with Jesus** – speaking with Him – thinking on how He is with you, to help you, how He cares for you in every situation or predicament of life.
- **Feed your mind and spirit with truths about Jesus by singing songs of praise to Jesus** – letting the words reverberate in your sub-conscious – so that even when you are asleep, your mind can still be thinking on Jesus – and then waking thought will be on holy things rather than just our own problems.

Conclusion:

Yes, we can enjoy a simple faith in a complex world. We can enjoy God's peace amid all the anxieties and uncertainties we face.

The choice is ours – daily – trusting in Jesus alone, not in ourselves.

The choice is to fix our thoughts on HIS greater strength in place of our weakness, HIS greater ways to provide for our needs instead of the ways we dream up, HIS greater work for us to do instead of the work we would like to do, HIS greater purposes for our lives instead of living for our own empty and temporal pursuits.

What is your answer to King Jesus this morning? God's message is simple and clear: Consider JESUS, our Apostle and High Priest. Pull out the weeds in your minds, and plant the seeds of God's truths about Jesus. Let the garden of our minds produce good and beautiful flowers and fruit.

The blessings or rewards will be ours:

- We will enjoy more and more peace of mind. Cf. Isaiah 26:3.
- We will also be able to face all the trials and troubles of life – not as “enemies”, as “problems” meant to hurt or harm us – but rather as “friends”, as God's refining instrument and as His way to strengthen our faith in Him.
- We will think thoughts that lift us above the superficial and meaningless way of looking at life. See 2 Cor.4:16-18.

And the blessings or “fruit” will also honour God.

The more we focus our minds and thoughts on Christ, the more we will become like Him in this world – and the more others will be drawn to Christ.