

God's rescue plan (II) – Salvation as healing

(Here I will only give you a description of this view of the gospel. I don't have space to support it with chapter and verse, but you'll find a biblical exposition in chapter 3 of 'Healing the Gospel' by Derek Flood, a book that I'd say is worth every penny and hour it would cost you.)

To see where we're going on this, think of a bully's abusive behaviour; it is probably an attempt to deal with their underlying insecurity and feelings of worthlessness. But although that need is perfectly valid and understandable, their way of meeting that need, by devaluing and hurting others, is obviously not acceptable – it's sinful.

Clearly the cross can offer forgiveness for the actual sins that the bully has committed, for the way they have hurt other people, but that doesn't tackle the root cause. Thankfully, the cross can also provide healing – 'by his stripes we are healed' – and in this broader view, we see sin not just as crime to be punished but as sickness to be healed.

Jesus didn't only come to forgive sin, but to liberate us from everything that could separate us from God and life, and seeing sin as sickness is very much part of Jesus' ministry and teaching, as Flood demonstrates in his exposition. He also shows how it's part of Paul's teaching, as he brings justification and sanctification together.

So what are the root causes of that sin-as-sickness? Well, there are many things that can spoil a person's life and relationship with God in this broken world, full of sickness and tragedy. It's tempting to spend time analysing them (as I'm prone to try to do!), but suffice to say that some of what we suffer is at the hands of other people, and some is just what life throws at us – illness and physical death being the most obvious.

But seeing sin as sickness is not some kind of let-out clause. We can't just say, 'It's not my fault that I did such and such. It was because of what I've suffered at other people's hands.' If you think of physical disease, there are many factors, but we definitely have a personal responsibility to care for our own health. Thankfully, though, if we end up with heart disease, partly because we're overweight and have had a poor diet, the doctor won't turn us away when we need treatment, saying, 'Well, it's your own silly fault!'

What a glorious gospel we have to proclaim! On the cross, Jesus took upon himself the whole sad sorry mess of our lives, there providing a way through to wholeness, to salvation, dealing with the root causes of our sin!

In a sense, that's the end of my 'thought for the day', point made. However, I kept writing, and it seems that a second important idea has led out from it...

The story of the woman caught in adultery has become very special to me on my journey. When Jesus said to her, 'Neither do I condemn you; go now and leave your life of sin', he didn't then add '...or I **really will** condemn you!' What I think he was saying was 'Now that you have a relationship with me, I have dealt with the **root cause** of your sin. So now you can walk free; you

can leave your life of sin – you are released!’ And I think he might even have added, ‘But if you do fall again, please don’t panic, and certainly don’t beat yourself up about it, just come straight back to me and receive forgiveness again.’ What a glorious Saviour!

So yes, OK, that extra paragraph is very much part of what I was saying earlier, but my thoughts kept moving relentlessly on. (What a privilege I have to spend all this time revelling in the glories I find in scripture!) So here’s how it went...

And do I hear in this an echo of Paul’s argument in Romans about ‘shall we go on sinning that grace may abound’?

But then I decided that I shouldn’t risk quoting it out of context; I ought to go back and read that verse, Romans 6:1, and see what else Paul had to say. But then I found that it was all rather complicated – you know what Paul is like! So no, I decided that this idea was too much to get into just now.

But I’m so much enjoying looking at scripture from a relational point of view that I decided to read on further into Romans 6. What a glorious chapter! Paul explains how, through the cross (‘united with Christ in his death’) we can come to be united with him in his resurrection and live a new life, now!

But Paul (like me!) goes on, revelling in this new life, this new relationship, and he asks why would you even **think** of keeping on sinning? You’d be bonkers to do that, given the glorious alternative! Just **live** in this wonderful new life of righteousness and enjoy your relationship with Jesus (and with our people, I guess, though Paul doesn’t mention that specifically here).

He continues by talking about how we can cultivate that relationship with Jesus and, (almost) finally, refers to ‘the benefit you reap [that] leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life’. Hallelujah!

But that’s the **penultimate** verse (22) of the chapter. So finally, finally we have verse 23:

23 For

the wages of sin is death,

but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I used to feel cross that people quote ‘the wages of sin’ and miss out the second half of that sentence, but now I realise that **the whole of the chapter(!)** is about how to cultivate our relationship with God. What an utter travesty of the scriptures to rip out that single six-word phrase and use it to ‘prove’ that **if you sin you will die** (and some preachers would even say, or imply, that you’ll die at the hand of God).

Now that has made me really angry! (Please forgive me.)

Put the phrase **back into the context** of our relationship with God, and Paul is saying that if we **do** sin it spoils our relationship with our loving heavenly Father. By sinning we pull ourselves away from God’s love (what a daft thing to do!), and if we **go on** sinning we’ll go further and further from God – and that is death. It’s sin, not God, that pays the wage.

OK, let me try to calm down, stop being cross, and apply that scripture back to our ‘naughty lady’. She has discovered the wonder and glory of a relationship with Jesus, who declares that she is released, freed from her life of sin. But he warns her, as Paul warns us in Romans 6, that as wonderful as that relationship is, we do need to make an effort to avoid sinning, otherwise we’ll slip away from that relationship and slide into ways that will tend to destroy our life.

Father God, we rejoice at what you’ve done in Christ, as he died for us on the cross. Please help us day by day to appreciate it more and more (and please help Paul in his digging into the scriptures to find more nuggets to share with us).

Lord, let it be!

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