

Engage: Mind
Delivered February 24, 2013

I should say from the beginning that some days as a preacher you have to talk about things that are not in your comfort zone. Some weeks I end up preaching out of the areas of my own weakness rather than my own strength. Then there are other days where I get to talk about things that are in my zone. This week is going to be one of those “in my zone” weeks.

When we looked at what Jesus said a couple weeks ago about loving God with your heart, mind, and strength, we set up a bit of a grid for how we relate to God. If I had to order those for me from strongest to weakest, I would say that I’m a mind, heart, strength follower of Jesus. I love to think about God, his word, and his ways. I can spend hours having great conversations with him, and then with myself about any number of ideas. I’m a feeler next, and last of all I’d say I’m a doer, because I always struggle with making good on the things that I think about.

So when I approach a problem I tend to do so from the perspective that I can think my way through the solution. Read, understand, and then act is usually my process for solving a problem. Only sometimes the things I’m struggling to understand can’t be just thought through. Sometimes they need to be felt out, and other times they just need to be acted on. When it comes to relating to God, I’m very comfortable engaging my brain in the process – much more so than engaging my heart or my actions. I love to read the Bible, but sometimes struggle with pulling my emotions into my relationship with God. I love to read the Bible, but then struggle with getting my body to do what my mind is telling me I should do with what I’ve read.

Some of you are feeling just like me because you’re very comfortable in your own head. You’re nodding your head because you can have those conversations with yourself, but may struggle to bring them to life in the real world. And if you’re not yet a follower of Jesus, the honest truth may be that sometimes your brain is a bit of a barrier between you and loving God. You may have a ton of unanswered questions, lots of “what if’s” and “why’s” that you feel prevent you from fully choosing to follow Jesus. You may be the kind of person who’s always trying to make sense of everything, even faith, and if you’re honest you might be a little skeptical about the Jesus movement because you’ve often heard that following Jesus requires you to check your brain at the door.

Others of you are going to find this message challenging because even though you’re already following Jesus, if you are honest, you just want to feel it, or do it – you don’t really want to have to think about it. So as we start to talk about following Jesus in a way that engages your mind you may wonder why we even have to bother with that in the first place. But the truth is that if we’re going to be the kind of church Jesus envisions then we really can’t just pick and choose the ones we want to engage.

Whether it’s in your zone, or at the bottom of your list, God gave you a mind with the ability to process information in a way that helps you make sense of your world. Even if you’re surprised to hear it this morning, I want to assure you that God actually wants you to use your brain in church. We are committed to being the kind of church that helps you think differently about your world, about God, yourself and your relationships. We want

you to walk out some Sundays with questions that puzzle you and ideas that disturb you, challenge you to think, and make you wrestle with your presuppositions.

So this morning we're going to go to the Scriptures because there we find challenges to our thinking, and material for our minds to consider and wrestle with. In particular we're going to look at **Romans 12:1-2**. This passage opens with a significant word that is going to make us do some background before we just dive into the passage – “therefore”. In this case it's a very pregnant word, because it signifies that Paul is going to make some statements that are based on what he has written before. That means we have 11 chapters of background pointing towards this “therefore” in verse 1.

Those 11 chapters paint a picture of the human condition. They show the sinfulness and brokenness of human beings apart from God, but they also show the way that God in his mercy offers salvation and rescue to those human beings through Jesus Christ. They show the depths to which human beings often sink in their journey away from God, and then they show the lengths to which God will go to bring them back to him – it's an amazing picture of human sin and divine mercy.

In chapter 1 he actually identifies one of the consequences of that sinfulness and brokenness of humanity. People did not honor God, and as a result became futile in their thinking (1:21). Since they didn't acknowledge God as the creator and worshipped other things instead, he gave them up to a corrupted, debased mind that tunes God out, even mocking him out of its own futility, arrogance and foolishness. It is not just the human heart that is stony and skeptical, but the human mind as well. No matter how insistent we are that our minds are open, they remain remarkably closed to God.

Therefore, since we are being rescued from that plight by God in his infinite mercy, he appeals to us to present our whole selves as a living sacrifice to God. This is the kind of offering that Jesus would approve of, because it would involve a heart, mind, and strength engaged in a love for God. Paul describes this as our act of worship before God. We don't present some kind of gift to him, we present ourselves to him to show that he is worthy of everything about us, not just a part.

The word he uses to describe this kind of worship is pretty interesting. In various translations it is described as “spiritual”, “reasonable”, or “true”. It is the word from which we get our word “logical”, and the best way I could think of to say it is that this is the kind of worship that makes sense. This is worship – the offering of our whole self – that is consistent with God's purpose for us, and so when we offer ourselves to God we do what he finds acceptable because this is how we were created to live.

He spells out the path to this kind of worship in verse 2. If we want to offer our true worship to God – worship that makes sense to God and us – then we have to break our thinking free from conforming to the pattern of the culture that surrounds us. Our thinking has to break out of the mold that seems to always be pressing in on us, trying to get us to agree with it. When we begin to follow Jesus, even to start down the path, our way of processing information has to alter. It's not that we stop thinking, just that we start thinking differently.

We are accustomed to viewing the world one way, but when we respond to Jesus' call to follow, that mindset has to shift because it is no longer sufficient for the journey. We

leave behind a thinking that is rooted in the prevailing mindset that only what you can see, taste, and touch is worth knowing, and that only the things you can observe with your senses are real. We are being asked to doubt the supremacy of our rational mind, and Jesus asks of us a far more open mind than we are used to. That takes critical thinking, deep thinking, and careful thinking and you shouldn't be afraid of that – Jesus and Paul certainly weren't!

As we submit to that process, we are allowing God to make us into a new person as our mind undergoes a transformation – literally a metamorphosis. Jesus begins to rearrange the way we think about everything and we see things in a new and different light than we saw them before. You are aware of yourself differently, God differently, and others around you differently. All your mind – your intellect, reason, and thinking – are being organized around a different fundamental premise. To truly follow Jesus cannot be a mindless pursuit; it demands an engaged mind being transformed. We are transformed by asking questions we can't answer, thinking thoughts that we haven't allowed ourselves to think before, and reconsidering some answers we thought we knew but maybe didn't. The starting point is different, and the ending point is different too.

The goal of a transformed mind for the follower of Jesus isn't objective, scientific truth and rational knowledge. The pursuit of a transformed mind is testing and proving the will of God. We want to know what God wants – his good, perfect, and pleasing will for our lives. As we allow God to transform our thinking we are still engaging in the same process as before – observe and test – it's just that now we want to discover how to better please God with our lives. That may not always make rational sense, but it will always make sense to the transformed mind. There will still be internal tension as you wrestle with new thoughts and open yourself up to God's purpose and will, but in the process your view of the world will become much more like God's.

Some of you came here today and though you're not following Jesus yet you needed to know that there was a church that told you it was okay to think in church. Maybe your experience in church taught you otherwise and so you tuned it out because you couldn't bear to be in a place that wouldn't engage your mind. So you have my word, you're in a place where it will always be okay to think, to ask questions, and to wrestle with things you don't understand. The one thing I ask of you in return is that you open up your mind just a little wider and ask God to start transforming your thinking.

Others of you have been following Jesus but you've been doing it without really engaging your mind in the process much at all. You're feeling and doing, but not really thinking much. I'm going to challenge you this morning even if it's not your first priority to take some time to think a little more deeply about your faith and your following of Jesus. Read a little more, ask a question when you don't understand, have a conversation with someone else here when you disagree, maybe even think about what you heard today for more than 30 seconds.

I am convinced that if we want to see our community have a different view of Jesus and the church then we have to be a place where the mind is engaged in a serious pursuit of following Jesus. We want to see minds transformed so that more and more people come to the understanding of God's will for their lives. It's a huge task, but it's our task.