



Back to the book of Revelation...sort of. Last time we discussed our mission as priests (Revelation 1:6; 5:10) and that this task involves a very specific purpose: "It is the duty of priests to teach the true knowledge of God" (Malachi 2:7). As priests we are to display the beautiful character of God as revealed by Jesus Christ. Our workplace is the sanctuary (or temple) which represents the mind. When priests diffuse a true knowledge of God the result is to cleanse the temple as people change their mind about who God is and begin to see him as the same in character as Jesus.

In a previous article on the book of Revelation, I made the claim that "The book of Revelation should be seen as a message of healing, not a message of destruction." (1) Very much in parallel with this, the sanctuary system is also a message about healing and a restored relationship (at-one-ment) with God. So let's spend a little more time on the subject of healing and then next time on the meaning of the furniture and blood in the sanctuary system. All of this will be helpful as we continue through the book of Revelation.

Last week Dorothee and I watched (again) the movie "Les Miserables" an adaptation of the 1862 novel by Victor Hugo. The first 10 minutes is the perhaps the clearest illustration on film of what the Kingdom of God looks like. The story line is about Jean Valjean, a convict who spent 19 years in chains for stealing a loaf of bread. He was about to spend his first night out of prison on the streets when a kind bishop took him in for the night and gave him a warm meal. During the middle of the night, however, Valjean stole the bishop's silverware and then clubbed the bishop over the head in his rush to escape. The next day Valjean was caught by the police who brought him back to the bishop's home in chains, silverware in hand. It would seem that his life was over – either doomed to life in prison or death.

But then, in an action that defies any worldly wisdom, the bishop told the police that he actually gave Valjean the silverware and then proceeded to scold Valjean for "forgetting" to also take the

silver candlesticks – “I’m very disappointed in you Valjean, you could have fetched a good price for those.” The police were stunned, but not as much as Valjean. Never had he been treated with kindness before, especially in the face of such treacherous behavior toward the bishop. This incredibly gracious act turned Valjean’s entire life around and, as the story unfolds, Valjean became a very successful man using Kingdom of God methods (returning evil with good), but yet he was in constant fear that people would discover his past life.



The rest of the movie involves police inspector Javert, who knew Valjean in prison. Javert eventually discovered that the now wealthy and popular governor was none other than Valjean - "the criminal". Javert’s philosophy was based on the assumption that people do not change and he ruthlessly spent his entire life chasing Valjean down. Valjean had several opportunities to kill Javert but always allowed him to escape. This only seemed to infuriate Javert’s anger and determination to capture Valjean. He could not wrap his mind around the fact that Valjean, a “criminal”, could possibly turn his life around and now be a good and virtuous individual. It destroyed his entire system of justice and eventually led him to commit suicide. At one point in the movie Javert said (in essence) “once a criminal, always a criminal...people don’t change, science has shown us this.”

It would be interesting to know what “science” he was referring to, because of course now “science” tells us exactly the opposite! Our brains are not permanently hardwired for success or failure. We are not hopelessly destined to have either healthy or unhealthy thought patterns. Our genetic makeup, does not force us into either having a good or bad moral compass.

The brain is now viewed as a remarkably dynamic organ. Neuroplasticity describes the process of the real physical changes that take place in the brain based on our thoughts and how we choose to respond to life experiences. This occurs due to short-term synaptic modulations and long-term neuroanatomical growth and pruning. These changes are dramatic and involve complex networks, synaptic connections and pathways. For example, a recent study of 38 medical students revealed a significant increase in grey matter in a portion of the left hemisphere over a period of time while studying for examinations. (2)



Not surprisingly, neuroplastic changes may occur in a destructive manner as well. For example, inadequate parental care during infancy adversely affects brain development and may lead to conditions such as conduct disorder. In adults, poor adaptation to stress may lead to psychopathology due to negative neuroplastic changes. By contrast, “early positive and nurturing experience generally influences a developmental trajectory that allows the child to make positive adaptations to stress.” (3) This is true for adults as well.

Why is all of this important? Turning back to “Les Miserables”...what “science” NOW reveals is that the kindness the bishop revealed to Valjean actually set in motion a process of transformation, “rewiring” and healing of his brain. The bishop revealed the other-centered love of God and this had a powerful transforming result.

It seems to me that this is confirmation of a repeated Biblical principle which is that by beholding the true love and character of God we become changed! And here we are back to the function of being a priest once again – to reveal Christ-like love to others.

One of the negative factors of viewing the legal model as the only way of understanding the plan of salvation is that this often has a tendency to minimize any consideration of transformation in the “sinner.” We are “declared” righteous by God and are “covered by the blood” such that when God looks at us he really doesn’t see us – rather he sees the goodness of Jesus. In this model, we are like a hopelessly rotten apple that is covered with caramel and candy (i.e. – the blood of Jesus). The way some have described this process we are essentially just hanging around on this earth, as worthless and depraved sinners, waiting to die so that we can get to heaven. Only then are we given a Christ-like character.

This view, however, ignores the abundant evidence of scripture that says that we are meant to change into the character of Christ as we are in relationship with him, and that this process should begin now. In fact, “the plan of salvation” is really “the plan of healing” since to “save” something means to “salvage” or to apply a “salve” that heals a wound.

For example: “We know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is.” (1 John 3:2) Notice in this verse that as we see Christ as he is that we naturally

become like him in character.

This does not mean that we are changed by knowing “facts” about God or even by believing the important words that “God is just like Jesus in character.” There is much more! This process must involve a face to face relationship and intimacy with God:

“Whenever, though, they turn to face God as Moses did, God removes the veil and there they are--face to face! They suddenly recognize that God is a living, personal presence, not a piece of chiseled stone...Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him.” (2 Corinthians 3:16-18)

Daily, we need to bathe our minds in the love of God, “Yes, may you come to know his love – although it can never be fully known – and so be completely filled with the very nature (the very character) of God.” (Ephesians 3:19)

Some view this as a threat, “You mean I have to be like Christ to get to heaven?” But that is not the way to look at this at all!

Imagine that you see a physician for a severe headache and fever. She diagnoses you with meningitis and says to you, “I can make you perfectly well. If you follow my advice, take this medication, spend a few days in the hospital, and then keep your appointments with me, you will be completely healthy.” Would you grumble and say, “Look, I just want to be forgiven and be out of here. Are you telling me that I have to do something? Take medications? Keep appointments? What kind of a legalistic doctor are you anyway?”

Wouldn't you be overjoyed that there was a cure for your condition? Wouldn't you eagerly desire to follow the physician's advice, not for legal reasons but just because it makes sense and because you want to get better?

From a spiritual perspective, we are all sick. We suffer from pride, selfishness and a host of other symptoms due to the sin problem that has separated us from God. Is it wrong to desire real change and healing? Is God not strong enough to heal us or does he only offer forgiveness? God is forgiveness personified! That is not even an issue! Of course God forgives – always – but his question to us is, “Would you like to be well again?”

Don't misunderstand. We don't get to heaven based on how healed we are and it is dangerous to focus on how healed or how messed up we are. What is all-important is that we place all of our trust in our Heavenly Physician (and not the quack pretend doctor, named “Dr. Slippery Snake”). For example, the thief on the Cross put his trust in Jesus and that was all that was necessary. He died perhaps not having done a single good deed but yet he trusted Jesus and he will be in the Kingdom but with much to learn and with much need for ongoing healing.

But consider this. Had the thief somehow not died on the cross but yet lived out the rest of his life in a continued trusting relationship with Jesus, healing would have occurred because healing is a

natural and unavoidable consequence of remaining in a trusting relationship with God. The fact that healing is possible should be seen as a hopeful promise of great good news rather than as a daunting command. As priests in the world, we have a remedy, and our mission is to spread that healing remedy by revealing the other-centered love of God and reconnecting people to Jesus Christ.

The book of Revelation describes a people who have experienced this transformation and healing. They are willing to lay down their life for others: "They didn't love their life so much that they refused to give it up" (Revelation 12:11) and that kind of agape love is only possible if we are in intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

The book of Revelation climaxes with the greatest description of restored relationship and healing in the entire Bible:

"Look, the home of God is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them...On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations...The throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and his servants will worship him. And they will see his face, and his name (character) will be written on their foreheads. And there will be no night there and no need for lamps or sun for the Lord God will shine on them." (Revelation 21:3; 22:2-5)

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### Footnotes:

1. Sigve Tonstad
2. Draganski et al. "Temporal and Spatial Dynamics of Brain Structure Changes during Extensive Learning" *The Journal of Neuroscience*, June 7, 2006, 26(23):6314-6317
3. Mastergeorge, "Clinical Implications of Current Findings in Neurodevelopment" *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, Volume 32, Issue 1, March 2009