

A Radical Disease

- "My name is Colin and I am an alcoholic...."
 - even if it is not entirely accurate, I guess most people will recognise the formula - the opening line each person makes at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting.
 - Perhaps we have a picture of smoky, perhaps dingy rooms, with a circle of chairs, and folk from the edges of society sitting there!
- Of all people, we in Scotland don't need to be told how serious alcohol abuse can be.
 - the hugely high proportion of crime that is alcohol related;
 - the family trauma and breakdown that is alcohol related;
 - the high proportion of A&E visits that are alcohol related;
 - the grip alcohol can have on those who become addicted, whether they recognise their condition or not;
 - the deceptiveness it can bring into relationships - for it does not just affect the "rough sleepers", the "alkies" we tend to bring to mind wandering the shopping centre with their carry outs, but also apparently respectable folk who try and hide their addiction....
- A radical problem - affecting people deeply and fundamentally.
 - a problem that robs its victims of life
 - not just physically, through liver damage or whatever...
 - but also robs them of **relationships, of family, of job, of pleasure in life, of satisfaction** - for everything becomes coloured by the need for the next drink.
- Do we think of sin in the same kind of way we do alcohol?
 - very often, especially in the church, which is full of respectable, upright, upstanding folk, we can forget how radical a problem sin is
- The first thing Paul wants to **remind** the Ephesians in the passage we read earlier is just how horrendous a problem sin is:
 - "as for you..." (v.1)
 - he says it robs of life (v.1) - dead because of transgressions (commission; disobedience; stepping over the line) and sins (omission; missing mark; weakness).
- Dead - despite appearance of life on the surface, up and walking about, reality is death:
 - John Stott says: "in the sphere which matters supremely (which is neither the body, nor the mind, nor the personality, but the soul) they have no life. And you can tell it. They are blind to the glory of Jesus Christ, deaf to the voice of the Holy Spirit. They have no live for God, no sensitive awareness of his personal reality, no leaping in their spirit toward him in the cry "Abba, Father", no longing for fellowship with his people. They are as unresponsive to him as a corpse."
- This state is brought about because of God's implacable hatred of evil - and his considered, steady, uncompromising wrath against all that is evil. (v.3b)
 - affects everyone (v.3a), whether we care to admit it or not;
 - affects everyone, however much we try and hide it;
 - "as for you..." (v.1); *this is who we were*
 - affects everyone, whether we are the "out and out sinner", not caring what we do, or who knows, the "alkie" of sin, or whether we are respectable on the surface, covering up our sin with a veneer of right behaviour, of church attendance, of good deeds.
- "My name is Colin and I am a sinner...."

A Radical Remedy

- Alcohol addiction is a radical problem and requires a radical remedy.
- **First** stage is that admission of a problem: "my name is ... and I **AM** an alcoholic", every week, never changes, part of who that person is.
- **Second** part of the radical remedy is that an alcoholic intent on reformation dare not touch a drop again, ever.

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- no "quick half" with a friend, no toast at a wedding....
- the alcoholic who is serious about change will employ a radical remedy.
- If change is to happen, a radical remedy has to be employed.

- In a very different kind of way, the same is true for we who are sinners.
 - a radical remedy needs to be employed to combat a radical disease
- Like the alcoholic, we need to start by admitting our sin, confessing it to God:
 - ruthless honesty with who we really are, with our real motivations and intentions; not pleasant!

- But where the alcoholic employed their own will-power to change - hopefully supported and encouraged by family and friends - the radical remedy for sin is not something we can take on ourselves.
- Paul's whole summary of the Christian faith in these few verses hinges on two words: **"BUT GOD..." (v.4)**
 - God broke into the situation to make a difference;
 - we were dead; robbed of life; captive; enslaved; and condemned.
 - but God stepped in to save us.
- Three things are worth picking out about the salvation God offers:

By Grace

- First, it is **"by grace"**
- Have you ever tried to figure out what that phrase actually means?
 - can be quite hard to get hold of!
 - maybe **"God's Riches At Christ's Expense"**
- but I still didn't get it...
- Until a colleague once summed it up for me as **"God treating me in a way I simply don't deserve - that is grace!"**
- remember seeing a programme on Salvation Army - officer out on local streets with alkiees - treating them in a way they did not deserve
 - that is like God's grace to us.
- Nothing that we did - only Christ's loving initiative and gracious mercy!
 - so we don't boast!!!

Saved

- Result is salvation - a reversal all the bad consequences of sin!
- So:
 - **life** - like the new life God gave to Christ (v.5);
 - **raised up** - like the exaltation of Jesus when God took him back to heaven to be with him (v.6a);
 - **seated** - in heaven, with God, on a throne, like Jesus seated at the right hand of his Father in Heaven!! (v.6b)

Through Faith

- Final thing about salvation is that it comes through faith:
 - **we need to respond;**
 - not a blanket coverage of the whole human race; not even a blanket coverage of everyone who has stood up and confessed faith in Christ - down to attitude of heart - could stand at front here and mouth the words and mean nothing by them.
- Granted, even this faith is God given, in the ultimate sense.... but from this side of eternity, we need to respond and not simply assume we are OK!

A Radical Response

- We might characterise that response of faith, at its best, as a radical response to the radical remedy for the radical disease!
- Often find reformed alcoholics are the ones most zealous in helping others:
 - **they know in a way no one else will the terrible power and grip of alcohol;**
 - **they know the pain first hand;**
 - **they know the relationships they lost or nearly lost, the money the squandered,**

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the life that nearly passed them by.

- And so they are motivated to help others, with a radical zeal and burning passion
- Our response to the salvation Jesus offers us should be the same!
- He has saved us from a radical disease, one that robs us of life, holds us captive, enslaves us and brings us to judgement.
- But now we are free, given new life, raised to heaven and seated on heavenly thrones with God!
 - we know the power sin has on us - for it still holds us tight, even though a mortally wounded and defeated enemy;
 - we know the joy, the glorious freedom, the fresh and vital relationship with God himself that comes through faith!
- And so our desire will be to respond radically to the radical remedy God has given us in Jesus Christ to our radical disease.
- We will live the life described in v.10: "a life of good deeds [in union with Christ Jesus], which he has already prepared for us to do."
 - (a response to the gospel, not a buying of that salvation!)

So:

- lets admit our radical disease, confessing our sin;
- lets look in faith to Jesus for rescue, knowing we can't help ourselves;
- and lets live in gratitude lives of "good deeds", radical discipleship, putting him top of our agenda always!