

DAY 1 - (week beginning Mon 1 Apr 2019)**Read - Luke 14:15-24**

“Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’” v 21

As we continue our ‘Journey with Luke to the Cross and Beyond’ we come to this interesting parable told by Jesus.

It may be interesting to us, but William Barclay makes the point that to the Jews this would have been packed with meaning. One of the pictures that the Jews had of the coming of the Messiah was of the Messianic Banquet where God would prepare a banquet for His chosen people. For the Jews this was a special feast for the Jews, and the Jews only.

Jesus was making a very clear point to the Jews that they had been invited but if they did not turn up, then Gentiles would be invited to the banquet – in fact they would be invited anyway.

Jesus was trying to make it clear to the Jews of that day that He is an inclusive God, not the exclusive God they thought. He was reminding them that all the way back to the covenant with Abraham in Genesis, God had wanted His people to be a ‘blessing to all nations’ (Gen 12:3).

So our theme for this week is that ‘All are Welcome’. And while, at face value, we may easily agree with that, I hope that God will show us all this week that this is not as simple as it sounds.

Prayer: Father please open our eyes and ears to be able to truly understand Your inclusive heart.

DAY 2**Read - Colossians 3:5-14**

“Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” v 9-10

Paul expands on what God’s inclusivity means in this reading, but first he takes us back to our previous theme of ‘Renewing the Mind’. Once again we are urged to think differently, the way God does, if we are to truly follow Him.

T K Abbott, the Irish scholar, notes that Paul here illustrates 4 different barriers to inclusivity that are destroyed by Christianity.

Firstly there is the barrier of birth or nationality – ‘neither Jew nor Greek’. In Jesus’ day, both the Jews and the Greeks thought they were something special, above the rest. The Jews, after all, were God’s chosen people and so despised everyone else.

The Greeks thought they were the aristocrats of the world and everyone else was a barbarian. There is no such special race or nation with Christ. All are welcome.

Secondly the barrier of ceremony or ritual is destroyed – ‘circumcised or uncircumcised’. How sad it is that so many of the barriers between the different churches come about because of different rituals and ways of doing things.

In Christ these barriers should be removed, not created. How dare we look askew at others simply because they do things differently. All are welcome.

Prayer: Father, help me to think differently.

DAY 3**Read - Colossians 3:5-14**

“Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.” v 11

How good we are in this world at erecting the same sort of barriers between people as Paul mentioned so many years ago.

The third barrier that is removed in Christ is the barrier of cultured or uncultured – ‘barbarian or Scythian’. Now the Greeks considered all others as barbarians, the word barbarian literally means speaks differently. However the Scythians were the worst of the lot!

The ancient historian Josephus called them ‘little more than wild beast’. In those days there was no interest among nations in the language of others, it was only in the church that this developed. In Christ the most cultured and the most uncultured person can sit together and share deeply about their love for their Lord. Even today, the church is where this happens most naturally, or at least should!

Finally, In Christ the barrier between classes is removed – ‘slave and free’. In Jesus’ day, slaves were not even classified as humans, but rather as property and this still exists in some places today.

However, in the church, there should be no such division. In the early days of the Church, a slave was sometimes the leader of a church that included their master. I have been in a home group that included the general manager and a labourer from the same company. All are welcome.

Think: Do you see people as different groups?

DAY 4**Read - Galatians 3:26-4:6**

“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” v 26-28

Unfortunately as humans we tend to see people in groups: us and them; black and white; rich and poor; boss and employee etc.

Sadly, this is so often true of Christians as well. We also see ourselves as separate from non-believers, or believers from another church. But that is not God's way.

I have heard it said that when we get to heaven we will be surprised at who we find there, but not nearly as surprised as some people will be to see us there! This is unfortunately true because of our tendency to separate people into groups.

We really struggle to not see things in human terms, the way the rest of the world sees, but to rather see things God's way. But if we are to better understand God then we need to realise that all are welcome.

Jesus died not only for me and my sin, but for the sins of every other person on this planet. We are all just a special to God no matter how new or advanced we may be in our walk with God.

And God's plan is that we should all live together and worship Him together as one large family of brothers and sisters.

Prayer: Father, please help me not to miss the joy of the diversity in Your family.

DAY 5**Read - John 3:1-18**

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” v 16-17

However, there are some who are particularly hard on themselves and so tend to feel that they are the ones who don't deserve to be part of the family.

If you feel totally unworthy of God's forgiveness, then you are right, but that is only half the story. The glory of the Gospel is that Jesus came to forgive and cleanse us from our sin so that we can stand before Him blameless.

It is God's deepest desire that we should acknowledge our sins before Him, receive forgiveness and then move on without the baggage of the past into a new life of freedom.

Don't be inclined to separate yourself from others in the church because they seem to be so much more 'advanced' in their walk. That is not what they or God would want for you.

By God's grace you can stand among all other Christians, because they only stand there by that same grace. We don't have different categories of Christian in the church because each one of us is an undeserving, saved sinner.

The sooner we all realise that nothing else actually matters, the sooner we can break down the barriers that we erect.

Prayer: Father, thank You for Your amazing grace to me!

DAY 6**Read - Luke 14:15-24**

“At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses.” v 17-18

We return to our original story from Luke as there is one more important lesson that we need to take from it. In ancient times it was normal to invite people to a banquet but not specify when it was. Then when all the arrangements had been made, the announcement would go out to the invited – ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’

So this would not have been strange to the original hearers, but sounds very odd to us. That is, until we realise that Jesus is talking to us about the great banquet in heaven.

We have been invited now, and have accepted the invitation, but there is a lot that happens between accepting, and actually turning up. Just as the Jews had lost their way and their understanding of the Messianic banquet, and missed it, so we too can get lost on the way.

The reasons others gave – worldly things take our attention, people get in the way etc – can just as easily apply to us as we are tempted by these things too. They want to grab our attention and become our focus.

While there is nothing wrong with any of these things, they can get in the way of our preparation for eternity. We must be sure that we are always available to God's call – not just the final call, but the other calls long the way. Don't miss out!

Prayer: Father keep me ever diligent in following You.