

DAY 1 (week starting Monday 3rd Sept 2018)

Read - Luke 16:19-31

But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony." v25

"Dad loves you more than he loves me!" Ever heard those words? The parents would probably deny it and say that they love all their children the same. But amongst the children of a family there is often a feeling, rightly or wrongly, that Dad or Mom loves one more than the other. That they have favourites. That feeling can be very hurtful, and damage people psychologically in many deep ways. One child may be more gifted and talented than another and the less gifted one may feel that the spot-light is always on the more talented one. One child may get all the attention and the other feels neglected. One child is well behaved and successful, and the other is always in trouble and feels condemned or criticised more than the other.

The person who feels that they are discriminated against, or less favoured than others will always feel hard done by, or that they are at a disadvantage. That can be true in families, but it can also be true in the work-place, or in society, or even in the church. A boss may have their favourites. Apartheid organized society so that white people were more favoured than black people and that has left huge resentment in our country to this day. This parable of Jesus makes it clear that God has no favourites, and that he will turn such things upside down in heaven one day. Those who have been discriminated against in this life will receive a greater blessing in the after-life.

Father, thank you that you love everyone, and all are equal in your sight.

DAY 2

Read – James 1:9-11

Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But those who are rich should take pride in their low position ... v9-10

The church should be the one place where all distinctions are wiped out. There can be no distinctions of rank or privilege when men and women meet in the presence of the King of glory. There can be no distinctions of merit when people meet in the presence of the supreme holiness of God. In his presence all earthly distinctions are less than the dust and earthly righteousness is as filthy rags. In the presence of God all men and women are one. (Barclay)

There is no doubt there must have been social problems in the early church. It was the only place in the ancient world where social distinctions did not exist. It would have been awkward when a master found himself sitting next to his slave in church, or if his slave led the service or gave him Holy Communion. The gap between master and slave was very wide in those times. Furthermore the early church was predominantly poor and if a rich person was converted, there would have been a real temptation to make a fuss of him and treat him differently.

James was deeply concerned that such favouritism should not creep into the church. Throughout Jesus ministry he made it clear by teaching and example that no one is more or less important than anyone else in God's sight. Earthly importance has no place in the Kingdom of God.

***Sisters and brothers, we are God's children:
But will the parenthood of God be known
If we do not reflect his love to others
In charity and justice God is shown. Hymn 407***

DAY 3

Read - James 2:1-4

My brothers and sisters, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favouritism. v1

All people are equal in God's sight, and the ground is level at the foot of the cross, and therefore we should never treat some people as if they are more important than others. How often don't we treat a well dressed and important looking person, or someone who is wealthy, better than someone who is shabby and poor.

N T Wright tells a story of how one year he came to an Easter service only to find that the church was packed and there was a long queue waiting outside. A certain Lord (X) recognized him, took him by the arm and went up to one of the door-stewards and said, "I'm Lord (X), could you see that my friend and I get good seats!" Whereupon the door-steward ushered them into the church, past everyone who was waiting, and seated them in good seats right in the front. N T Wright says he felt terrible all the way through the service because he knew what Jesus would say.

No one is more important in the church than anyone else. In certain parts of the early church they had a rule that if a stranger, and particularly a poor stranger, came into a service, then the bishop himself would go and welcome the newcomer and offer the him or her his seat, even if he (the bishop) had to sit on the floor. How different that is to what goes on in some of our churches today.

***From heaven you came, helpless babe
Entered our world, your glory veiled
Not to be served but to serve
And give your life that we might live***

DAY 4

Read - James 2:5-9

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters, has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? v5

Often we treat someone who is rich better than someone who is poor. But Jesus taught that we should never judge others, one way or the other. And the irony is, as James points out, that the “successful” and the wealthy may often have gained that success or that wealth by oppressing others, or through dishonest means. In addition it is often the rich who find it difficult to identify with the Lord Jesus, who came as a humble servant. The rich and the powerful are not more favoured by God than the poor and the lowly. Queen Elizabeth is not more important to God than a street person.

Are you easily impressed by status, wealth or fame? Are you more partial to the “haves” than to the “have-nots”? Such an attitude is out of line with God. God has no favourites. He sees all people as equals, and if he favours anyone, it is the poor and the powerless, the widow and the orphan. And certainly colour, culture and social background make no difference to him.

All this flows out of the royal law which Jesus taught, “*to love one’s neighbour as oneself*”. Love always shows respect for others and honours them. Love is humble and kind. Love puts others before oneself. Love always wants the best for the other.

***This is our God, the servant king
He calls us now to follow him
And give our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the servant king***

DAY 5

Read – Matthew 25:31-40

The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. v40

James was concerned that the church should be a community in which there is no favouritism, and everyone is treated equally. The community of believers should be a model of the kind of society God wants in the world, pointing in the direction God wants the world to go. But in the world there is much inequality, unfairness and favouritism. The majority of people in the world today are poor and struggling. And therefore Jesus commands his followers to reach out with love and caring to those who are under-privileged and less fortunate. A plate of food, a cup of water, clothing, hospitality, a visit to those who are sick or in prison; these things show those who feel they are not ‘favourites’, that God cares about them.

This parable describes acts of mercy that we can all do every day. They do not depend on wealth, ability, or intelligence. They are simple acts, freely given and freely received, and they are signs of God’s love for those who are not the ‘favourites’ of the world. We have no excuse to neglect those who have deep needs, and we cannot hand this responsibility over to the government or ‘the church’. Jesus demands our personal involvement in caring for others’ needs (see Is 58:6-7)

***Where cross the crowded ways of life
Where sound the cries of race or clan
Above the noise of selfish strife
We hear thy voice, O Son of Man
A cup of water given for thee
Still holds the freshness of thy grace
Yet long these multitudes to see
The strong compassion of thy face Hymn 431***

DAY 6

Read - Galatians 3:26-4:7

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. V29

The Jews had great difficulty in accepting that God was, and continues to be, for all people. Somewhere along the line the Jews got to believe that they were God’s favourites.

One of the major focus points of Jesus’ ministry was to teach and show people that all of us are equal in God’s eyes; that God has no favourites.

Jesus continually reached out to the unclean and the outsiders.... the “un-favourites” of the world.

- + He healed lepers who had to ring a bell and shout “unclean” when they came to town
- + He changed the lives of prostitutes and tax-collectors
- + He healed sick and demon-possessed people
- + He gathered around him disciples who were ordinary “blue-collar” people
- + He told a parable about a Samaritan, whom the Jews regarded as second rate “un-people”.
- + He told a parable about a shepherd who left the 99 sheep and went in search of the one that was lost.
- + He told a parable about a man who gave a banquet in honour of his son, and when those who were invited didn’t come, he sent his servants into the streets to invite the poor, the lost and the lame.
- + And when he finally died on the cross it was an “un-favourite” Roman soldier who cried out, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

Jesus taught in word and action that God has no favourites. He loves everyone.

The love of God ... so wide it never passed by one, or it had passed by me. Wesley