

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

JUNE 10-14, 2019



IN COMMON

SERMON SERIES

June 2 – July 28

MONDAY

Revelation 5:9, 7:9-10; Matthew 1:1-17

Of the accusations frequently made against Christians, topping many critics' lists are the labels "bigoted" and "narrow-minded." How valid are these? Is Christianity available to only specific types—particular to race, nationality, affluence, education, etc.—and thereby elitist? Is the opportunity to follow Christ exclusionary?

Ancient Israel was called to be a "holy" nation, set apart for God's purposes (Exodus 19:6), words which 1 Peter 2:9 later applies to the Christian church. We're encouraged to be "*in the world, but not of the world*" (John 17:14-15). Some mistakenly interpret these words as asserting superior merit while promoting isolationism—this characterized ancient Israel's prevailing culture, various monasteries and, sadly, some contemporary believers. But those embracing such views ignore what follows scripturally: "... [to be] a light for the Gentiles" (Isaiah 42:6) and "... that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9, NIV).

Matthew's Gospel opens the New Testament with a genealogy countering exclusivism and "cookie-cutter Christianity" (Matthew 1:1-17). It presents Jesus' earthly lineage back to Abraham and Jesus as Israel's Messiah and rightful heir to David's throne. However, Matthew's Messianic family tree also features five then-shocking inclusions: women, marginalized in ancient Middle Eastern cultures and generally excluded from related genealogies. Moreover, several of the women listed had unsavory backgrounds.

Tamar deceptively seduced her father-in-law, Judah, subsequently confronting him with their illicit coupling (Genesis 38). Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute (Joshua 2:1). Ruth the Moabitess was likewise a Gentile foreigner (Ruth 1:4). Bathsheba was an adulteress who later married King David, the orchestrator of her husband Uriah's execution (2 Samuel 11). The virgin Mary was an impoverished, otherwise nondescript Jewish teenager engaged to a similarly common, poor carpenter.

One key point of Matthew's diverse, curious genealogy of Christ: our Lord can redeem anything and anyone. He is unwilling that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9), the friend of sinners (Mark 2:16-17), the Head of a Body (Ephesians 5:23) made up of highly varied parts (1 Corinthians 12). Jesus is the *only* Way to salvation (John 14:6). However, that Way is open to *anyone* willing to believe on Him (Acts 16:31).

QUESTIONS

Why do so many label Christianity as “promoting bigotry” and “narrow-mindedness”? What are the surprises in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus Christ?

PRAYERS FOR REDEEMING LOVE

Pray for Redeeming Love, whose mission is to bring restoration to survivors of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation. (<https://www.redeemingloveca.com/#mendthebroken>)

TUESDAY

1 Peter 2:9

Western Europe's historic global imperial and economic influence, coupled with the US's similar prominence over the past 125+ years, support a notion that Christianity is decidedly "Western." Catholicism's historic prominence in Latin countries and Protestantism's influence in Europe, plus their former "colonies," reinforce this. So, is Christianity a faith particularly for "advantaged white people" and those with "Spanish roots"?

Remember that Jesus and His early followers were not "white Europeans," despite Renaissance Art's popular depictions. Jesus was ethnically Semitic; He and His disciples likely had darker skin and features. Moreover, various key biblical players featured other diverse ethnic backgrounds: Zipporah, Moses' wife [from Cush, Africa]; Solomon's "guest," the Queen of Sheba [modern Yemen]; Simon of Cyrene [Libya], who helped Jesus carry His cross to Golgotha (Matthew 27:32); and the Ethiopian eunuch to whom Philip witnessed are noteworthy examples. Consider the influence and contributions of contemporary non-Anglo, American Christians, including the Reverend Martin Luther King [African-American] and Pastors Raul Ries [Mexican-American] and Francis Chan [Chinese-American], to name just three.

Statistics on worldwide populations indicate that Christianity is declining in Western countries while growing substantially elsewhere, notably Nepal [+11% annually], China [+11%, with Christians now making up 11% of the PRC], several Muslim/Middle East countries [UAE and Saudi Arabia at

+9% annually; Qatar, Yemen and Oman all +7% growth], and elsewhere in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. (*Nations Magazine*)

Consider also the impact of Christianity among early African slaves who were forcibly brought to America. “[The slaves] fell in love with the God of Scripture. ... In Christ they found salvation from their sins and reconciliation ... [in] a here-and-now God who cared principally for the oppressed ... [and] a suffering Savior whose life and struggles paralleled their own. ... The Bible did not denigrate African identity ... [but validated] their right to be free and function as equals. ... In Him [they found] the reality of Resurrection power.” (Dante Stewart)

The living God is not the God of white people nor Hispanics nor any particular group. He is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34) and background, but He is Lord over all creation and people. Southern California, uniquely diverse, provides wonderful opportunities to witness to all types of people desperately needing the Savior.

QUESTIONS

How has Christianity become less “Western” over time? Why did many of the original African slaves become Christians?

PRAYERS FOR REDEEMING LOVE

Pray for the survivors of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation that they may experience the fullness of God’s love as they struggle with processing their trauma and move towards healing.

WEDNESDAY

Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 10:25-37

Jesus' teachings to "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44) and "turn the other cheek" (Matthew 5:39) may sound impractical to fallen humankind, particularly those inclined as "warriors." He practiced what He preached, however, most magnificently when praying for His executioners during the crucifixion (Luke 23:34). All are fallen, born rebels against God and His Christ (Romans 5:10); however, this is the very thing that necessitated the Messiah's earthly rescue mission—we were among the lost whom He came to save. One might interpret that Jesus didn't consider any mere humans His true enemies.

The 1st century Jews, though, were another story. Generally speaking, they resented and hated their Roman occupiers. The Samaritans ["half-breed" products of Jewish-Assyrian intermarriage resulting from the Northern Kingdom's 8th century BC captivity] were also despised by most "pure" Jews and shunned accordingly beyond Jesus' time. They were enemies in the eyes of ancient Israel.

Isn't it interesting, therefore, how prominently both Roman centurions and Samaritans figured into both Jesus' and the Apostles' ministries? Matthew 8 tells of the faithful centurion who asked Jesus to heal his paralyzed servant. Another centurion declared at Jesus' crucifixion, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39). Peter baptized the centurion Cornelius and his entire family, placing them among

the first Gentiles to become Christians (Acts 10). Centurion Julius ensured that Paul and fellow prisoners weren't slain by soldiers amidst a shipwreck (Acts 27). And Jesus seemed to have a particular emphasis upon Samaritans, featuring the "good Samaritan" as the hero of today's parable, famously witnessing to the Samaritan women at the well (John 4), and healing the grateful Samaritan leper (Luke 17).

Jesus not only taught about loving enemies—and demonstrated how—but prominently showcased Israel's perceived enemies to illustrate God's inclusive offer of salvation. President Abraham Lincoln appeared to get this. Criticized by advisors for being "too nice" to political opponents, Lincoln responded, "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?" (Goodreads)

QUESTIONS

In what ways did Jesus Christ live out and exemplify loving enemies? Why were Roman centurions and Samaritans so prominent in Jesus' and the Apostles' ministries? Who are the "Romans" and "Samaritans" in your life? Do you pray for them, desiring only their greatest good? When did you last share Christ with any of these?

PRAYERS FOR REDEEMING LOVE

Pray for Redeeming Love's staff and volunteers. Pray that they may extend Christ's love through their work and service.

THURSDAY

Galatians 3:28-29; Acts 16:13-15, 40; Acts 18:1-3, 18, 24-26

One charge against Christianity is that it denigrates women; the Apostle Paul sits on this witness stand. Selected Pauline writings sound at least politically incorrect, if not chauvinistic. For example, “*Women should keep silent in churches*” (1 Corinthians 14:34), “*Wives, submit to your husbands*” (Colossians 3:18, Ephesians 5:22), “*Woman [was created] for man*” (1 Corinthians 11:9), and “*I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man*” (1 Timothy 2:3). Yet Paul also emphasized the then-radical thoughts of equal codependence of men and women (1 Corinthians 11:11) and the identical claims of husbands and wives regarding their spouses’ bodies (1 Corinthians 7:4).

Rather than criticize, many defend Paul’s writings as “taken out of context” or “applying only to specific church situations of that day” vs. “universal teaching.” Regardless of interpretation, however, one clear truth emerges: equality is different than sameness. Paul penned today’s Galatians 3:28—“*[We] are all one in Jesus Christ*”—and emphasized that the Body of Christ is made of diverse, yet equally important parts (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

Consider Paul’s partnership with and appreciation for many women he ministered alongside. Paul commended Phoebe as a deaconess (*diakonos*) at Cenchræe, one who had effectively led even him (Romans 16:1-2). Paul called Priscilla a faithful co-worker in Christ (Romans 16:3)—some maintain that Paul’s colleague, Priscilla, penned Hebrews. Paul applauded other female “co-workers,”

including Mary (Romans 16:6), Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis (Romans 16:12), and Nympha (Colossians 4:15).

If there's controversy regarding Paul and women, there should be none regarding our Lord. "Jesus' regard for women was ... 'revolutionary' ... For Christ, women have an intrinsic value equal to that of men ... [likewise] created in the image of God. ... [Jesus] treated women not primarily as females but as human beings. ... Jesus regularly addressed women directly while in public (extremely counter-culturally) ... [and] held women personally responsible for their own sins ... [Jesus] honored women, taught women, and ministered to women." (James Borland)

Many people with an agenda use Paul's more controversial writings as inflammatory proof texts. It's important, however, to grasp the full counsel of God for such emotionally-charged topics. Thoughtful consideration reveals Christianity as advocating for women, as well as others who are historically marginalized.

QUESTIONS

Why do many characterize the Apostle Paul as a male chauvinist? What are some of the relationships that counter such views? How did Jesus elevate the status of women vs. how they were viewed and treated in surrounding cultures?

PRAYERS FOR REDEEMING LOVE

Pray for our law enforcement and lawmakers. Pray that more attention is drawn to the issue of sex trafficking so that we can work towards eradicating this issue.

FRIDAY

Isaiah 61:1; Luke 18:9-14; Luke 7:36-50

Jesus was a “*friend to sinners*” (Matthew 11:19). He spent quality time with tax collectors—despised for their collaboration with the Romans and exploitation of countrymen—harlots, adulteresses, liars, thieves, murderers, lepers, hypocrites, criminals and other outsiders. One might offer, “That’s heartwarming, but I’m not one of those.” Spiritually speaking, I’ve been all of these at different times. And I would bet you have worn a few of these hats yourself.

“Good moral citizens, the ordinary people, normally occupy the middle rungs on the social ladder. That leaves the bottom dwellers, those such as prostitutes, substance abusers, criminals, the homeless, and ... lepers and tax collectors. ... Although hardened by sinful pleasures, and sometimes encased in self-constructed tough exteriors, the social outcasts ... [are frequently] easier to reach than the ... self-righteous elite. Often, beneath the outcasts’ bravado lies emotional emptiness characterized by poor self-worth. ...

“[Jesus] created [in the downtrodden] a renewed sense of personal value. He established that foundation by consistently loving and accepting the outcasts, whose hearts were often melted by [His] warm and loving reception. ... While He does not [justify] sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, [Jesus] seeks not to condemn, but to save. ... Christ died for everyone.” (Jakarta Central Church)

Can you, like Jesus, love the marginalized? Glenkirk's homeless ministry is one avenue. Do you know anybody who is or has been an inmate, or has an incarcerated friend or relative? There are multiple prison ministries to connect into, or you can simply take this on yourself. Glenkirk also offers many short-term mission possibilities to serve the disadvantaged either domestically or abroad. What's stopping you from plugging into one of these, enabling you to share Christ's inclusive love with others in need?

As we've explored all this week, the Body of Christ is wide-ranging, though not "another social or self-help organization." There are no qualifications to joining, just recognition of our utter inability to rescue ourselves and the resultant, heartfelt acceptance of God's provision, the Lord Jesus, as our personal Savior. Peter characterized this with his short, fervent prayer, "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:30). What other outcasts do you know who need to hear the Good News of the reconciling, sacrificial love of Jesus Christ?

QUESTIONS

Who were some of the categories of sinners Jesus appealed to? Why are the downtrodden often more open to the Gospel than others? What are some areas open to you to love and serve those often marginalized by society?

PRAYERS FOR REDEEMING LOVE

Pray for all those who are currently enslaved in sex trafficking; pray for freedom and rescue.

Sources

- *Nations Magazine* demographic data is from the November 2013 edition (<http://nationsmagazine.org/top-20-countries-christianity-growing-fastest/>)
- Dante Stewart's quote is from *Christianity Today*, February 12, 2018 (www.christianitytoday.com/history/2018/february/why-enslaved-african-americans-stayed-christian)
- Abraham Lincoln's Goodreads quote can be found at www.goodreads.com/quotes/10667-do-i-not-destroy-my-enemies-when-i-make-them
- James Borland's quote can be found at www.crossway.org/articles/how-jesus-viewed-and-valued-women
- The Jakarta Central Church's quote can be found at <https://jakartacentralchurch.org/lesson-7-jesus-and-the-social-outcasts/>

