

Why Jesus is the Answer to Gender Inequality

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[0 : 00] This morning's reading comes from Galatians chapter 3 verses 26 to 29.

That's Galatians chapter 3 verses 26 to 29. So in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith.

For all of you who were baptized in 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. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.

Thanks, Rosalie. Good morning. I'm Jake, part of the church family here and a ministry trainee. As we get going, I want to make two introductory comments.

[1 : 11] The first is this. I want to acknowledge that in various ways the church hasn't always lived out its calling to view people and treat people with equal value and dignity.

And people in this church, myself included, will have thought and acted in ways that demonstrate an attitude that values people differently based on their gender or race or background.

And where that's been the case, that is unacceptable. We are without excuse. And we're sorry. Please forgive us.

And if the pain allows, where that has been your experience, please tell us. We want to know and we want to change. It might be that you can't tell us. And so please share it with a friend who might be able to pass it on to us.

Second introductory comment. This is a huge subject. I've made calls about what to focus on and won't answer everyone's questions.

[2 : 29] So considering this, the start of a conversation, as Simon mentioned, I'm going to be on Zoom at 8 o'clock this Wednesday evening. If you've got questions or want to discuss things further, why not come along?

Of course, if you're here in person today, you can chat to me after the service. That said, let's press on. Why Jesus is the answer to gender inequality.

Forgive me for what I hope is an obvious observation. Gender inequality is a real problem. In her 2014 UN speech, Emma Watson was clear.

No country in the world can yet say that they have achieved gender inequality. And in her 2020 book, *Invisible Women*, Caroline Criado Perez makes clear.

The consequences of gender inequality are deeply entrenched in society. And in many cases, devastating. Gender inequality is an old problem, of course.

[3 : 39] Philosophers through the ages almost always seem to view women as lesser than men. It's a current problem. In *Invisible Women*, Caroline exposes the data bias between men and women, showing, as the title suggests, women are essentially invisible in much data and therefore decision making.

She gives examples. So, cars are designed with safety features, thankfully. Most of those safety features are based on measurements for average men.

Or space for toilets is split 50-50 in most places, which seems equal, right? But accidentally prioritizes men. We end up with so much space for urinals and women are stood in queues for half an hour.

So, it's a frustrating problem, too. Whether it's the toilet queues or it's the assumed preference for large phones that only really fit the male hand. Or the tiny or total lack of pockets on women's clothing.

In all sorts of ways, the world is set up for men at the expense of women. And then there's the reality that gender inequality is a wicked problem.

[5 : 01] Julia James, the murdered PCSO in Kent. Sarah Everard, abducted just down the road and killed, to name just two recent examples of women abused at the hands of men.

And the list is too long. Many of us will have heard of Everyone's Invited, the online platform where people are given space to share their testimonies of rape culture in schools and universities.

There are stories from men and women. But the vast majority are examples of men viewing women as objects of very little value.

And it's further evidence of the wickedness of the problem of gender inequality. Of course, men have suffered abuse by women.

There are instances where men are considered less valuable. Toxic feminism is real. And we don't want to minimize those wrongs. But overwhelmingly, the tide through history has been to exalt the value of men over and above that of women.

[6 : 16] That is undeniable. And it is unacceptable. And it grieves me to say the problem is in the church sometimes too.

Just after the Me Too movement trended, there was a Church Too trend. And the recent allegations and evidence against Ravi Zacharias, the well-known Christian speaker.

It's just one example of men who have encouraged misogyny, abused their power, and treated women as of lesser value. Wherever it takes place, individuals being viewed to have different value based on their gender is unacceptable.

Gender inequality is a real problem. So if it's such a big problem, why aren't we making more progress?

Every time we come up with a creative solution, there seems to be so much potential. A vision is set for how this will transform society.

[7 : 22] It promises so much and then time and again fails to deliver. Take the Enlightenment as an example. In various ways, it brought positive change.

The rise of individualism carried some huge benefits as people were encouraged and empowered to take responsibility for their own decisions. And then the negatives came too.

The rise in individualism leading to the fracturing and breakdown of community and family life. And you can plot the same steps forward and backward with other ideas too, like the sexual revolution and with feminism.

Progress, potential, hope even, but with its negative consequences too. Our solutions are so limited.

And they fail time and again for two reasons. First, our solutions for gender inequality fail because they don't have a concrete foundation.

[8 : 32] We have lots of motivations for equality. The economic benefits, the freedom from oppression. But put to the test, these motivations are limited.

Because when conflict arises, who gets to decide what really matters? Over and over, the people with power. Outside of the Bible, I can't find a robust foundation for gender equality.

If we take God out of the equation, all the foundations that we might come up with are changeable and fragile over time. The second reason our solutions fail us is closer to home.

Our hearts. We are capable, aren't we, of so much good. And yet we have this deeply rooted tendency to mess stuff up.

So every time we do come up with a good idea and implement it, it gets twisted, distorted and abused. And the Bible gives an honest diagnosis to these two issues.

[9 : 48] Genesis 1 and 2 paint a picture of a world full of life and beauty and goodness. They're chapters at the beginning of the Bible that give concrete foundations for equality.

Humanity made in the image of God. From the moment of conception, declared to be inherently valuable. Men and women created different but equal in God's sight.

It's beautiful. And yet Genesis 3 tells the sad story of the beginning and heart of sin.

We reject God and his good creation foundation as if we say, No thanks, we don't need you, we'll make it on our own. And from then on, having rejected God's offer of life, the whole world and every person lives in the shadow of death.

And we're a messy mix of good and evil. The truth of Genesis 1 to 3, right at the beginning of the Bible, God's good creation and our rejection of him.

[11 : 04] It makes sense of my experience of the world. God's good, beautiful but broken. And my experience of my own heart, capable of good and bad all at the same time.

Perhaps you see the same as you look around the world and perhaps you see the same as you examine your own heart. You see the problem of gender inequality. It is one of the devastating consequences of our sin.

Our rejection of God. And of course that could be the end of the story. God leaves us in a descending cycle of good and evil until we all die out.

But he's not done with us. It's into this broken, fallen world that God the Son arrives with refreshing splendor.

Jesus is born in a first century world full of misogyny and extreme patriarchy where women are at best second class. And he shows us what life lived in right relationship with God the Father looks like.

[12 : 21] He is Jesus, our model. So let me tell you a story from chapter 4 of John's Gospel. Maybe you can imagine it.

Jesus' disciples, they've gone off to get food. Jesus is sitting by a well, weary from their long journey. And we read, if you've got it open, John chapter 4 verse 6.

It was about noon. So the sun is scorching overhead. There's nobody else around. And into this quiet scene, verse 7.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water. Ah. Now Jews, like Jesus, don't mix with Samaritans.

And particularly, Jewish men don't mix with Samaritan women. They'd barely even notice them, let alone spend time with them one to one. What might people think?

[13 : 30] Oh, it's a scandal. Oh, that's the culture. But it's not just that. This woman, she comes to the well on her own.

It's a communal activity. So where are her friends? And why does she come at the hottest time of day when she knows nobody else will be there? Well, as we read on, we get some clues.

We discover she's had five husbands and is now living with a man she's not married to. This kind of woman in this culture, because fairly or unfairly, she's seen to be promiscuous.

She'd be an outcast. She's been outcast, considered damaged goods. And this story is often explained, assuming the woman has been searching for a sense of identity in various sexual relationships, finding none.

But that doesn't make sense of her culture. She wouldn't have had the freedom to roam from marriage to marriage. Rather than pin the blame on her, more likely, her husbands have treated her like an object, blamed her, torn up the marriage certificate, and sent her off at their whim.

[14 : 46] And now the only man in town who will take her won't even offer her the commitment of his weak promise. So she's a woman, a Samaritan with no stability.

Perhaps she's been abused. She's vulnerable and alone. How will Jesus treat this bruised woman? We read verse 7.

Jesus says, Will you give me a drink? She's taken aback. Verse 9. How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?

She wasn't expecting to meet anyone at the well. Least of all, a Jewish man who sees her and actually asks for help.

Well, the conversation goes on. This is the longest dialogue Jesus is recorded having in any of the Gospels. And it's not a patronizing monologue. Read it through later.

[15 : 55] Jesus isn't a preacher on his platform with her. They have a long, personal, theological conversation about her relationship history, about what it means to worship.

And it all culminates in Jesus explaining who he really is. The Christ. God come to earth in flesh. Come to offer people eternal life if they'll have it.

This outcast Samaritan woman, Jesus speaks with her. He's vulnerable with her. He shares his life with her.

He discusses serious issues with her and invites her to eternal life with him. While his disciples arrive back, they marvel that he's talking with her.

And the encounter, it comes to an end. With her leaving her water jar and rushing back to the village to tell anyone who will listen who she has met.

[16 : 53] That is just a glimpse at one story briefly. But every time, Jesus is brilliant.

He overturns the cultural norms of the day. He treats everyone with equal worth. And when he sees bruises, he's tender and gentle.

Friends, if we could read of Jesus' treatment of women with first century eyes, we would be blown away every time. He welcomes, honors, exalts, and holds up as examples those his contemporaries despised and brushed aside.

Here's Jo Vitale, a Christian speaker who travels the world defending Jesus' claims. She says on this topic, When I look at Jesus Christ, I see exactly the kind of man I want to spend time with.

And exactly the kind of God that it is a privilege to worship. So many women know that experience. All through the Gospels and all through history, women are drawn to Jesus.

[18 : 12] Because with Jesus, Nobody is overlooked or undervalued. There are no hidden figures or invisible women. He is brilliant.

Perhaps you've never considered the beauty of Jesus. Maybe it's time to give him a proper chance to woo you. Perhaps you've cast your gaze his way before.

Maybe it's time for a second look. You see, Jesus begins to answer the problem of gender inequality with his stunning life. But it's not enough to simply say, Right, let's sort out gender inequality.

Let's be like Jesus. See, that's too similar to other religions and ideologies that say, Pull your socks up. Be better.

We've tried that, haven't we? We can all agree we need to do better. That's Emma Watson's plea. That's the plea of Caroline Criado Perez.

[19 : 22] But it's not enough. That is to ignore what's been evident since we rejected God in Genesis 3. Our sin has broken our relationship with God and leaves us under the shadow of death and judgment.

Much more than a new ideology or religious leader to follow. We need restoring to God. And this is where Jesus really is the answer to gender inequality.

If we were to read on from John 4, We'd make our way with Jesus to the first Good Friday. And we'd watch on stood next to two Marys as Jesus dies at the cross.

There he willingly takes on himself the death and judgment deserved by those who reject him. And then a few years later, Because of the facts of Jesus' death and resurrection and all it achieves, in AD 50, Paul writes the amazing sentences we had read to us earlier.

You can find them on the service sheet if you've got one handy. They're on the screen. The Galatian church, who Paul is writing to, have been battling with their old tendencies, valuing each other based on who keeps God's Old Testament law best.

[20 : 50] And Paul is at pains to remind them that is not how their new life with Jesus works. You've put your trust in Jesus, Paul says, verse 26, So, in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith.

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself 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.

When anyone rests their faith in Jesus, two stunning things happen.

They are, verse 27, clothed with Christ, and verse 26, they are adopted into the family of God. That phrase, clothed with Christ, it's what happens the moment somebody trusts Jesus.

It's a bit like putting on a school uniform. You are now identified as a pupil of that particular school. But here, in a much deeper, fuller sense, putting on Christ identifies you with him.

[22 : 05] So, all that is true of Jesus is now true of me. His payment for sin by death on the cross and his perfect life lived applied to me as if I were wearing them.

And that totally restores my broken relationship with God. So much so that Paul can call Christians children of God.

If you belong to Jesus, you're adopted into the family of God. And so the Galatians, having trusted Jesus, their deepest and overriding identity now is as children of God.

And notice the basis upon which anyone can be welcomed is the same. Faith in Jesus equals child of God. We are all equally undeserving of that privilege.

None of us can earn it or buy it. It is a staggering gift. It is what Christians are singing about when they sing amazing grace. That God, who I have ignored and rejected, would receive me at all is amazing.

[23 : 38] That he would gift me the privilege of being his son or you his daughter. That is stunning. This is the truth that completely changed my life at 18.

This is the truth that completely transformed the woman in John chapter 4. This is what changed Amber's life. Restored relationship with God as father. And this, the good news about Jesus, is the most powerful force for change in the world.

Just look at what Paul says, the result is in verse 28. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female.

For you are all one in Christ Jesus. Here is where Jesus is most profoundly and completely the answer to gender inequality.

In salvation, which is open to all and accessed by simple trust in Jesus, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female.

[24 : 44] All are one in Christ Jesus. All the divisions we might measure people by, all the dividing walls, the barriers are smashed down when it comes to having a restored relationship with God.

By faith, all are children of God equally. We're a family and there's complete equality. Equally saved, equally valued.

There's no such thing as a second class Christian. It's not that those differences between us vanish. We don't become clones of one another.

Everyone is still unique. Race doesn't cease to exist. Men and women are still different from each other. And it doesn't mean everyone has the same role to play. But there is no status ladder.

There is complete equality of value and worth. No superior or inferior because everyone entered this new way of life the same way and everyone is equally adopted as a child of God.

[25 : 53] This is grounds for social revolution. this new status and identity this restored relationship with God it gives us the ability to re-embrace God's blueprint foundation for the equality of all people.

Now sure we'll slip back into our old ways sometimes we'll forget who we most deeply are but by grace we'll increasingly live out our new identity in a way that means we rightly value every person made in the image of God.

Jesus is the answer to gender inequality because in Christ all are equally children of God. If everyone trusted Jesus rejoiced at being restored to God as children loved and treated one another rightly this really would actually work.

and it is something of the picture the Bible ends with. Hear this vision from the final book of the Bible Revelation chapter 7 John writes That's a picture of the future of God's family from every nation and people and language all together equal worshipping around God's throne and anyone can get in on it if they trust Jesus.

So where does this all leave us? With questions lots of them probably with scoffing maybe perhaps excited though could it be that Jesus really is the answer to gender inequality?

[28 : 09] I'd like to close by addressing two groups of people if I may. Firstly if you are if you're trusting Jesus you have the wonderful privilege of status as a child of God embrace it.

Likewise embrace God's foundation for the equality of all people. Seek to love everyone equally made in the image of God. Some of us will need to repent for the way we've valued people wrongly and it might be this is actually something you really struggle with.

Share that struggle reminded there is forgiveness for you. and let's be helping each other with our blind spots seeking to model Jesus love to everyone.

Secondly if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian I wonder if there's room in your framework for this to actually be true. If you're looking for a world view that values every person at a foundational level Jesus is for you.

So what do you make of him? That's the question. And maybe today is a good day to take a fresh look at his life and his claims. Take away a gospel they're on the way out read it through examine how Jesus treats women.

[29 : 36] I've put some suggestions of places to start on the service sheet. Maybe you've got loads of questions ask a Christian friend or I'm happy to chat or join us on Zoom on Wednesday.

Friends Jesus is the answer to gender inequality. I'm going to pray. Join me if you'd like to. Heavenly Father you are the source of life and the giver of all good things.

Thank you for this creation and all its beauty. we're sorry for our part in its brokenness. Please forgive us. Thank you for welcoming all who trust Jesus as your children.

Help us to love others like Jesus does. We pray in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.