

Can't choose your Family

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. I'd be grateful if you had your Bibles in front of you as we go through. We've got a variety of passages to jump into, but keep your fingers in both those passages, Luke 10, Ephesians 2, but also Romans 5, if you can get to there as well. That'd be great.

Our purpose as a church is to treasure Jesus together for God's glory and the joy of all people. Okay. Values are the things that shape our behaviours and our attitude.

That is, values are the ingredients of any culture that is formed. We've got seven core values that shape the culture that we're seeking to build here at St Paul's.

And one of those values, as you often see declared around the place, is treasuring Jesus together. That value reads like this. Every member of St Paul's has been led individually by the Spirit of God to receive Jesus Christ as the Lord, Saviour and supreme treasure of their lives.

The Holy Spirit gathers us from all the variety of our individual backgrounds and unites us together as one body in Christ. And so we believe that the people whom Jesus has called into relationship with himself from every tribe, language, nation and generation are his church and not an institution or a building.

[1 : 28] In an age of individualism, we value vigilance and accountability in treasuring Jesus together as his diverse people.

Now, because all values like that result in aligned behaviours and attitudes, one of the things that I did in the early days was ensuring that the core value was not just a statement, but actually had lived out behaviours and attitudes so to ensure that we were actually aligning ourselves with that value.

That is, whatever you value will result in how you behave. And so I want to reverse that and say, here's the behaviours that are associated with that value.

And so I feel that out. And as a church, for instance, if we are saying that we're pursuing treasuring Jesus together, then making corporate worship a weekly priority is how one will behave.

Treasuring Jesus together by engaging to watch over one another in love, remembering one another in prayer, aiding one another in sickness and distress, cultivating sympathy, Christian sympathy and joy, being courteous in our speech, being slow to take offence, slow to take offence, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the command of our Saviour to secure it without delay, welcoming people from every background, openness towards new people and the avoidance of clickiness, purging our lives of the sin that causes division.

[3 : 15] That value is why we're doing this series right now. Racism and ethnocentricity are hot topics in our society. They are politically charged topics.

That's not the reason why we're doing this series. The reason we're doing this series, and I'm not here to sort out all the political issues in our society, I'm here to bring the authority of the Word of God to the people of God, to bear on us His people so that our life together here might reflect something of His glory and bring an element of hope and glory and joy and good to our neighbourhood.

That's why the church has always existed. That's the purpose of this series. We cannot live out our core value of treasuring Jesus together if it's not also deeply connected to our core value of humble authenticity.

Unless humility is worked out in our heart, we can never, ever achieve TJT. And so the issue for us in this series is whether we are growing together in humility.

That means searching your heart, not other people's hearts. Your heart. Not my heart, your heart. Hearts humbled by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 43] And that's my task today. Let's pray. Gracious Father, as we delve into your Word, help us to see that your Word speaks first and foremost to the reader. And not to others.

And so Lord, bring your Word into every heart, we pray this morning. Amen. We saw two weeks ago that one of the foundational biblical truths is that all people are equally made in the image of God.

There's one race, the human race. There is a solidarity in the image of God and a royal dignity attached to every single human being. The bad news is we also have solidarity in sin, which is what we looked at last week.

We have all rejected God. We've all got a broken image. And we have defiled the purpose of bringing glory to God as our creator. And there is no, there's not a hierarchy of some more sinful than others.

And likewise, with this issue of racism and ethnocentricity, there's not a hierarchy of some more sinful than others. The solidarity in sin sets us up against God and against each other.

[5 : 53] The compasses of our hearts point inwardly towards us, not towards God and others. And sin means that we all have a default suspicion of other people because there is an innate desire to make the world and everything about me.

About me. The Bible also gives us the good news. And I started with that last week. Abraham, Genesis 12, God's promise that through him all the nations will be blessed.

And the biblical narrative builds from that moment in Genesis 12 and it finds us center in the person of Jesus Christ. And we've even declared that this morning.

If you look at the worldview, I've been unlying in front of us. Even as we stood there and we declared from Colossians, he is the image of the invisible God.

The exact representation of his being. And he came in to this world to bear sin. And in the biographies of Jesus' life, we see Jesus is constantly dealing with this issue of sin.

[7 : 05] And how it gets worked out even in the issue of ethnocentricity and racism. In fact, you often see in the biographies of Jesus, the hated foreigner is the recipient of God's blessing and the hero of his stories.

It's remarkable. One of the best examples is what was just read out to us by the Fitzroy family.

Thank you guys for that. The Good Samaritan Luke chapter 10. So go there if you like.

In fact, not even if you don't like. It would be great if you did go there. I'm not actually asking for you. I just... Okay, let me just go there. Okay? Verse 25.

A lawyer, a Jewish lawyer, asked Jesus what he must do to receive eternal life.

And Jesus asked him what he thought the law said about that. And his reply is, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.

[8 : 07] And Jesus says, yeah, that's right. Go and do that. Go and do that. But verse 29. He wanted to justify himself.

And so he asked Jesus, yeah, but, you know, who is my neighbor actually? Who really is my neighbor? He's looking to justify himself.

He's looking for Jesus to affirm that his thinking and his actions are righteous. He's looking to limit who my neighbor is.

So in order to fulfill the law. You see, the Jews of Jesus' time interpreted, and he's a lawyer here, he is a legal lawyer, in terms of the law, the Old Testament law.

They interpreted neighbor of this command from Leviticus 19 verse 18 to mean fellow Jews.

[9 : 10] That's what it means, your fellow Jews. And at a stretch, it may have included foreigners who were permitted residence and contributed to their corporate life.

But it certainly didn't include anyone else. And then so Jesus pipes up and tells a story to his mainly Jewish audience.

And it's possibly the most socially charged story that Jesus ever tells. He's telling it with his disciples.

They're with him there at the moment. And if you know anything about Luke 10, preceding Luke 10 is Luke 9. And the gospel's just been rejected in Samaria.

His disciples have just walked out from Samaria. Jewish guys. And so it's charged for them right now. We've just been rejected. You've just been rejected in Samaria, Jesus.

[10:11] And then Jesus tells this story. He says, this guy traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. We are to assume that the man is a Jewish man. It's a main road that would have traveled by lots of people and Jewish people.

This man gets robbed, stripped, beaten, left for dead. And by chance, a Jewish priest comes wandering by. This is the Jewish pastor. Surely he's going to help him.

But no. The priest couldn't be bothered. He walks on the other side of the street. He didn't want to get near him.

Jesus goes on and says, now a Levite comes by. Again, you would think that this fellow Jew would help.

Can't be bothered. Also walks by. And then Jesus says, along comes a Samaritan. Bearing in mind that the Samaritan hated Jesus too.

[11:16] And Jesus says, along comes a Samaritan. And you can guarantee in the crowd at this moment, there's a Samaritan? What's a Samaritan doing in the story?

Jewish and Samaritan Christians ran deep over a long period of time. Samaritans were despised. They were not to be associated with. By the time of Jesus, the animosity between them had been growing for several hundred years and had overflowed in explosive violence in the first century. What's Samaritan doing here, Jesus? And he's the hero. He sees the injured Jew on the side of the road.

He goes over to him and has compassion on him. Cleans him up. Treats his wounds. Puts him on his donkey. Takes him to the local motel. Checks him in. Hands over his credit card. Says, I'll fix up every expense when I get back.

[12:23] By the time Jesus is done with this story, the Jewish jaws are on the ground. Imagine the impact. A Samaritan? Hero? That's unthinkable. Reclaim Australia is a far-right Australian nationalistic protest group, which primarily opposes the practice of Islam in Australia.

It opposes a number of things, but primarily Islam in Australia. It has organised, you're probably aware, several protest rallies in major cities across the country over the recent years.

To give you a flavour, one speaker at a protest rally in South Australia warned of the risk of Islamic barbarity in our country and encouraged those in attendance to insult and to vilify Islam five times a day if you want to.

That just gives you a flavour. So imagine the response if I am a speaker. I've been invited along to come to Reclaim Australia at one of their rallies, and I get up and I tell the story of an injured SAS trooper in Afghanistan.

Blown up by a roadside bomb, lying there, dying. An Australian medic comes along, sees him, and walks straight past him. Then an Australian military chaplain pretends not to see him.

[13:59] And then coming to our Australian SAS trooper's aide as an ISIS fighter. Treats him of his wounds, takes him to a clinic, pays for all his expenses, including paying for his military pension for his family.

Do you think I'm going to get invited back? Jesus says to this lawyer, do that. Do that.

Treat your worst enemy like that. Now remember, this goes back to the question, the original question of what the lawyer, how might I get eternal life?

And so when Jesus says, hey, just do that, he's not saying, give that a try, have a crack at that and see how it works for you. Make sure that your good acts outweigh your bad acts.

He's actually saying, do that all the time. Get your worst enemy and treat them like they are your most loved friend. Do that all the time.

[15:12] Live and act and love and serve and think and sacrifice like the good Samaritan, 100% of the time, all the time for your worst enemy. Then you can start thinking about confidence with eternal life.

Go and love and serve and sacrifice people who belittle you, curse you, marginalize you, ridicule you, hate you, berate you, ignore you, demean you, racially profile you and would even kill you.

Do that. And that's the end of the story. That's the end of it. Go and do likewise.

And so is the answer of eternal life, but also the answer to racial division in our world. Just try harder. That's why C.K.

Chesterton once said that Christianity has not been tried and found wanting. It's been found difficult and left untried. Now Luke was inspired by God to write what comes next.

[16 : 22] One scene ends with a lawyer and the next is in a living room with two sisters. Martha is busy making stuff happen while Mary is making it, taking it easy at the feet of Jesus.

Martha storms into the living room and tries to get Mary up off her feet from Jesus' feet, come over here and help me in the kitchen. And in short, Jesus' response to Martha is, no, I'm not going to get her to move at all.

Let me cut to the chase here. Without going all the details of the Mary Martha story, which sister in this instance looks most like the good Samaritan?

Martha does. Martha does. Not Mary. She's sitting there doing nothing. Martha's busy doing stuff. And Mary is sitting there at the feet of Jesus.

Mary looks like a bad Samaritan. She looks like you're doing nothing, Samaritan. And Martha is going and doing and serving and preparing and Mary's doing nothing. She's just sitting at Jesus' feet.

[17 : 35] And I think the lawyer should have responded at the end of that story with the go and do likewise. He should have said, I can't do that, Jesus.

I can't do that, Jesus. And Jesus would have said, yeah, I know. I know. You need to sit at my feet and look to me.

You need to trust me. You see, the problem of sin, self-centered hearts, means that none of us can do it. That's my point from last week.

Don't make it a political issue. Make it a heart issue. The problem is our heart, not primarily our behaviors and our attitudes.

We need someone to treat us so comprehensively as we don't deserve that our broken image is restored, renewed, that it breaks our self-pride, confident pride, and grows us in humility.

[18 : 50] We all need a good Samaritan. To intervene because we can't heal the broken hearts, our broken hearts ourselves.

We are dead. We're not unconscious. We are dead on the road in our sins and our transgressions. And Romans 5 leads me, so we looked at it last week, Romans 5 leads me to believe that Jesus is the good Samaritan who does what we cannot do.

You and I are that man, that unnamed man, beaten and bruised and robbed and left for dead. We are, that's us spiritually, not just left for dead, we are dead spiritually.

Ephesians 2, we just read it. We are cut off from God. We are dead in our transgressions and sins. We have no ability to resolve our biggest problem, sin. And that means the consequences of sin will continue, continue, continue to ravage our lives and our relationships.

Now it may not seem fair that this is our state. When you look at the carnage of human history and racial genocide, and cancer and suffering and divorce and greed, and the fact that my weeds grow faster than my grass, it is so easy to get ticked off with Adam, to judge Adam.

[20 : 22] What were you thinking, Adam? My goodness, you had the Garden of Eden, you walked and talked with God. He said, just don't touch the apple. It wasn't really an apple, but just don't touch it.

What were you thinking? God picks this champion to be the head of humanity, and he blows it. And ever since then, he blew it, ever since he blew it, our lives have been messed up.

But there is something in all of us that says that's so radically unfair. It feels unfair, even though we join him in his choices every moment of every day.

And God understands that. He understands that. And so if you look at Romans 5, what we see here is that he picks another champion for the human race, to do that which is unfair to him.

To him. At the cost of his own life, God reconciles us to himself, his worst enemies. Romans 5.

[21 : 35] You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man, someone might possibly dare to die.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. Why we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The man beaten on the road represents us in our sin.

The good Samaritan is Jesus, who treats us in a way that we don't ever deserve because of our sin. He's great enemies. He treats us in a way that we don't deserve.

And how does he do that? What does he do? He trades places with us on the road. He allows himself to be robbed, beaten, and killed.

He was nailed to the cross as an enemy of the people so that we can be made friends with God and each other. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all people, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life to all people.

[22 : 56] For just as through the disobedience of the one man, the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man, the many will be made righteous.

What a text. Everybody on this planet who's ever put two feet, or one foot, or any feet on this planet is in that text.

Because Adam was the father of everybody, and therefore every person you meet of any ethnicity is facing what that text talks about. Death in Adam, life in Christ.

That's a global text. Don't miss that. This is the defining reality of every single person you will ever meet.

This is not a wimpy worldview. It stretches over all of history, over the entire world, for every individual. It profoundly affects every person in this world, and every headline on the internet.

[24 : 03] The spectacular sin of Adam is not as great as the spectacular grace and obedience of Jesus Christ and the gift of eternal life.

These words here in Romans 5 are precious words for sinners. The grace is free. The gift is free. The righteousness of Christ is free. And so I want to appeal to you all online in this room. Will you receive it as the hope and the treasure of your life?

If you do, you will reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ, and so receive it now. And what we see here is that what Jesus has done for us can have a profound impact on our life and our life together.

Ephesians 2, which outlines the fact that we are sinners made right in God's eyes, then moves on into a description of the division between Jews and Gentiles.

[25 : 21] And then in verse 19 to 22, there's a description of the reconciliation between Jew and Gentile. Now keep in mind here that the division between Jews and Gentile was not small, it wasn't simple, and it wasn't shallow.

It was huge, complex, and deep, had a very long history, and it was bloody. It was religious, it was cultural, social, and it was racial.

The divide here was as big or bigger than any divide that we face today. And so what happened? What happened between verses 11 and 12 of Ephesians 2 and verses 19 and 22 of Ephesians 2? What happened? Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died.

That's what happened. And he died by design. We see it in the word blood in verses 11 and 12, the second half, verse 13. You who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

[26 : 34] We also see it in the word flesh in verse 15, abolishing in his flesh the enmity. And we see it in the word cross in verse 16, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross.

And the rest of this text here in Ephesians 2 is Paul's explanation how the blood of Christ, his death in the flesh on the cross as the perfect image bearer of God bearing our sin removes the enmity between God and Jew, God and Gentile, Jew and Gentile.

Therefore, by implication between every ethnic group, cultural group, political group of Christians who are in Christ, from many bloodlines and cultures through the blood of Christ on the cross, we are brought into one bloodline, his blood.

God. God aims to create one new people in Christ who are reconciled to each other across racial and ethnic lines, no longer strangers, not aliens, no prejudice, no enmity.

God ordained the death of his son to reconcile alien people groups to each other as one body in Christ. Christ died to take pride away from our hearts, which is what should have happened to that lawyer on that moment when Jesus was telling this story.

[28 : 13] This is about you and your heart. You cannot do this. You who are filled with pride, the gospel breaks it. Whatever your race, whatever your status, in Jesus, the gospel smashes any form of pride that we may have built up for ourselves.

That's why our core value of humble authenticity is so, so central. for us. Racial and ethnic tensions are rife with pride.

The pride of white supremacy, the pride of black power, the pride of intellectual analysis, the pride of anti-intellectual scorn, the pride of loud verbal attack, the pride of despising silence, the pride that feels secure, the pride that masks fear.

Where pride holds sway, there is no hope, no hope at all, for the kind of listening and patience and understanding and openness to correction that mature relationships require and every single one of us needs correcting.

correcting. All of us need correcting. The gospel of Jesus Christ breaks the power of pride.

[29 : 33] It reveals the magnitude and the ugliness and the deadliness of our sinful hearts even as it provides deliverance from it.

Jesus' death on the cross for our salvation is a devastation to pride and so hold the gospel close. By grace you've been saved through faith and this is not from your own doing, it is a gift from God, not a result of works so that no one can boast.

Jesus saves us by grace alone so that we would boast in him alone. Pride is shattered.

So just imagine what ethnic and social and cultural controversies and political controversies and everything, what it would look like if the participants in the debate were in fact dead to pride, deeply humbled before God and able to listen to each other, able to listen.

because their identity is not attached to them being right but it's attached to who they are in Christ.

James will talk a bit more about that next week.

[30 : 50] See, this series is about your heart, it's about my heart and it would be somewhat ironic if we were to look down on others as we take this journey to the scriptures together to deepen our life together.

It would be somewhat ironic if we weren't searching our own hearts but looking at others and their failures instead. Wouldn't that be ironic?

And yet that's what I've done already. In fact, before I'd even finished preaching the first sermon in this series, I had thoughts of prejudice in my mind as I was preaching.

I'm still living with a sinful heart but thanks be to the gracious God, Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to him. My hope and my healing are in him alone. The more I stop working for my justification and sit at the feet of Jesus, the more I become like him, the good Samaritan.

[32 : 06] God is calling people of the world to share in a community that includes their enemies and reconciles them to those who worship and live in other ways. If this is the design of God, then we will not display and magnify the cross of Christ better than by more and deeper and sweeter ethnic diversity and humble unity in our worship and life together and our debating with those who are ideologically different than us in our church.

When we can do that in love, with patience, with listening, being ready and open for correction, we become paysetters for our world.

May we be characterised by grace and humility and civility as we are slow to speak, quick to listen to each other, seeking not just to understand a position, but to understand a person.

A person made in God's image as fallen as I am, but an equally a recipient of God's grace and mercy as I am.

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