



Jesus the Game Changer - Episode 2: Equality

Introduction

Jesus taught that each individual had inherent value - they were loved by God and worthy of love and consideration from other people. The teaching of Jesus, Paul the Apostle and Augustine (384-322 AD) soon after, shifted the focus from people being viewed only as members of families, castes, cities or communities, to being individuals of worth. This became the central plank of western thought and the foundation on which modern democracies were built. The shift to the focus on the individual and hence the foundation of modern western thought is directly attributable to the teachings of Jesus.

Watch: Episode 2 Equality

Getting started

Karl Faase quotes from the United States Declaration of Independence which states ...

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights."

1. Why was it necessary to commence this document with these words?

The life and teaching of Jesus

Read: Matthew 18:10-14

In the episode we talk of this parable as not making a lot of economic sense. The shepherd risks the 99 for one lost or missing sheep.

2. What do you think Jesus is trying to demonstrate about God with this picture?

Read: John 10:1-13

Here we see two different ways shepherds dealt with the sheep under their care. The first scene (v1-6) shows the common pen holding sheep in the village overnight. A number of different shepherds would come in from the hills and place their sheep in this common pen for safe keeping until they were ready to take their flock back out into the country side. When they were ready they would go to the gate of the pen (v3) and collect their sheep. They entered through the gate not over the fence, (thieves entered via other means). They knew their sheep and called them out. The sheep knew and trusted the shepherd and followed.

The second scene (v7-13) shows the shepherd out in the countryside for a number of days away with his sheep, away from the village and common pen. In this situation the shepherd built a small holding pen from branches and bushes. There was no door to this pen but the shepherd would lie down across the gap; he was the door and the protector of the sheep in the pen overnight.

3. How is the first picture of the shepherd calling the sheep out of the pen a reflection of God's role?
4. In the second picture the shepherd is lying across the gap of the temporary pen. What does this tell us about God?
5. In both scenarios Jesus compares the real shepherd to the thief or the hired hand. What is this seeking to tell you about God?

Game Changers

Read: Galatians 3:28

In this episode James Orr (Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Oxford) comments that the Greek philosopher Aristotle referred to slaves as 'anthropedon', a neuter term, neither male nor female, a non-person. Aristotle saw slaves as born into that role and the property of their owners. He viewed them as 'living tools'. In his book Politics he wrote '...indeed the use made of slaves and of tame animals is not very different; for both with their bodies minister to the needs of life'.

6. In the context of the philosophy that underpinned the Greco-Roman world, how do you think Paul's words in Galatians 3:28 would have affected people's thinking?

Read: Colossians 3:22-4:1

7. In the light of the culture of the time, how is this passage a change in the prevailing world view?

India has for centuries been deeply influenced by Hindu philosophy. Episode guest Vishal Mangalwadi (Philosopher and Social Reformer, India) seeks to help those from other nations understand this philosophy. Hinduism teaches that your place in this life is determined by your behaviour in a previous life. This concept is underpinned by two key ideas, first reincarnation, every soul returns again and again. Second your behaviour in each life impacts your place in the next life, this is referred to as karma. So the upper cast Brahmins feels justified in having privilege as this reflects their past life. This is a culture where inequality is institutionalised via religious philosophy.

8. Consider what life would be like in a nation where inequality of life is institutionalised?

Vishal Mangalwadi makes the point that belief in evolution does not logically lead to believing in equality of all people but rather points in the opposite direction.

9. Consider the concept of human equality from the perspective of evolution and a theory of survival of the fittest.

William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect brought about the end of slavery in English society. Wilberforce and those who supported him were very unpopular at that time. The English economy relied in large part on this trade. Any attempt to agitate for societal change in England brought fear and suspicion that this could encourage revolution, like that occurring across the channel in France where people rose up violently against the nobility.

10. How has this episode clarified Wilberforce's motivation?
11. What kept him going in the face of opposition?
12. There have been times and places where those who refer to themselves as Christians have supported the slave trade. What does this episode suggest regarding their values?

There is a lot of discussion in our community about equality and Christians have been accused of supporting inequality through the stand they make on moral issues.

13. If all people are equal does that make all ideas equal?
14. How do we define the difference between the equality of people and the equality of ideas?
15. In a world where many different versions of the truth, morality and equality are promoted, how can we decide what values to follow?

Personal Reflection

Jesus taught that every single human being is made in the image of God and all human beings are equal.

- How does this manifest itself in your thoughts and actions?

Further Reading and Research

Mangalwadi, V. *The book that made your world: how the Bible created the soul of Western civilization*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011. (see Chapter 3)

Metaxas, E. *Amazing grace: William Wilberforce and the heroic campaign to end slavery*. Oxford: Monarch, 2007.

Ortberg, J. *Who is this man? The unpredictable impact of the inescapable Jesus*. Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2014. (see Chapters 2 and 3)

Siedentop, L. *Inventing the individual; the origins of western liberalism*. London: Penguin Books, 2015.

Swallow, K. *Fierce convictions: the extraordinary life of Hannah More - poet, reformer, abolitionist*. Nashville: Nelson Books, 2014.