

Service & Acceptance in God's Kingdom

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Preacher: James Lapping

- [0 : 0 0] Great. Thanks, Martin. Thanks, Tracy, for reading, for Joe, leading us through the music. Let me pray for us as we start. If we're going to hear from God, then God is going to have to speak to us. And I need a lot of help in this passage.
- So let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the good summer we've had. We thank you that we can come together as a family now. We pray that we'd hear from you. We pray that you'd speak to us now.
- We pray that I'd be helpful in what I say now, this morning. In Jesus' name, amen. Great. Well, I wonder if you know how they review the year and they look at the word, the new word of the year.
- They might add that to the dictionary. So I wonder if you might take 30 seconds, just turn to your neighbor, and talk about the new word that you've heard this year. Just chat about it.
- Maybe some popular words come up. So 30 seconds. I'll give you in a moment now. Right. And I'll give you another 10. Let's draw that together.
- [1 : 0 0] So I won't ask you guys what they were. I'm sure there were some good ones there. But I found myself listening to a lot of podcasts this year. And the one word that is, it's actually two words. It's hyphenated, so it sticks together.
- I don't know if that's one or two. But virtue signaling. I wonder if you've come across that before. I think it's something that parliamentarians love to do. Election comes about, and what happens?
- You see Boris on a bike or something like that. And what they're doing is they're trying to show what a good person they are. And there's celebrities do it as well.
- They often show them with orphans or something like that to virtue, signal the good virtues that they have. So another good one might be driving a Prius, having a photo of you in your Prius, although you could afford a Benz or something like that.
- And what they're saying is this is a preferred social way of behaving. It's not obligatory. I don't think it's compulsory. But if you're wise, if you're a grown-up person, then this is what you should do.
- [2 : 0 5] And there's two responses. There's that response, you should live like this. And then there's the alternative response. The second response is, don't be daft. You're just being slightly daft.
- And if you're new at St. Silas this morning, we've been going through a series in Romans in the mornings at St. Silas. And we've begun a section looking at how Christians live at the start of 12 verse 1, where we're considering how we should live in view of God's mercy and how God has saved us.
- And Paul has explained how God has saved us, not through things that we do, but through what Christ has done and God's great gift of mercy in sending his Son to die in our place.

And so from chapter 12 onwards, he's addressing how we should live as the people of God whom God has accepted. And the particular section that we're looking at, we began looking at last week and continue this week, Paul is writing to people who have cultural differences, who have different views on religious observance, and who are coming together as one church.

And it's this cultural baggage that is threatening to split them and divide the church. And the particular context there is of Jewish folk who've left the church in Rome, who have come back to their church.

[3 : 33] And what do they find? They find all the Gentile Christians there. Martin used that great illustration of them all eating bacon butties. The Jewish Christians knew that, of course, bacon is fine to eat, but culturally they couldn't quite get themselves to engage in it.

So they are Christians, but they're struggling with this. And we saw this at the start of chapter 14 last week. So I'll just read it one, two, three. Accept one another whose faith is weak without quarreling over disputable matters.

One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another whose faith is weak eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not.

And the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. And remember, Martin explained to us that their faith being weak there is not talking about their faith generally, but in regard to this very specific cultural issue.

And then the issue there, that quarreling over disputable matters, is those cultural practices. Those issues where sometimes we say we have freedom as Christians, where others might maintain that, no, those are actually very important for the Christian life.

[4 : 52] And we know what some of them might be. Some of them are more obvious than others. So we might think, how do we treat Sundays? What do we think about Sundays? Is Sunday Sunday or is it Sunday Saturday?

How do we think about alcohol? What do we think about that? Maybe slightly edgier, swearing, perhaps. And then the example of fiction.

Can I read Harry Potter and still be a Christian? The debate's out there slightly. And the principle that Paul lays out for us in the section is that each of us should be bound by our own conscience on these issues.

And so he says at the end of verse 23 in chapter 14, everything that does not come from faith is sin. And that in this mixed context, we should learn to live with forbearance and understanding with one another over these differences as God's people who have come together.

So last week we looked at the lordship of Jesus and how that lordship means we're united. And this week Paul is going to explain and correct our understanding of what the kingdom of God and of being part of that kingdom is going to look like.

[6 : 07] And so I've got two main points that I'm going to spell out this morning for us. The first one is that in God's kingdom we should serve one another in the kingdom of God. And then secondly it will mean that we accept one another as Christ has accepted us.

So firstly there we're going to consider serving one another in the kingdom of God. And the key verse here is really verse 17 and 18 in the middle of the section there. It says for the kingdom of God.

It's very rare for Paul to speak about the kingdom of God so you know it's important if he mentions it. It's not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness, peace and joy and the Holy Spirit.

Because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. And then he gives us in this section three things to remember about God's kingdom as to why we should look to serve one another.

And the first thing that we should remember what the kingdom of God is about is that it's about love for others. So I wonder if you'll look down, just look at verse 15.

[7 : 12] He says, So as we come together as a church family, we should be thinking of others, one another, in all that we do and in treating them in love.

So in particular, we should be thinking about how our behavior, what we say and what we do affects the faith of those around us.

And I'm sure as parents, this is something, to the parents in the room, this is something that we are particularly keenly aware of as we think of the faith of our children. And I wonder if that's something that you've ever thought of.

How you behave affects the faith of those around us. Are we encouraging others by what we do or say? Or are we hurting their faith by what we do or say?

Now sometimes to encourage someone might simply mean a very gentle, appropriate, kindly word of instruction in the right manner, in the right context. But I'm going to suggest that for the most part, it simply means acting in a way that is sensitive to where they are at.

[8 : 34] And what will encourage them in their faith. So church is about loving others, not about what we can get from it. You see, when we meet one another at church and we see their behaviors, we never know where a person has come from, what their experience has been culturally that has led them to where they meet, where we meet them that day.

So I think about a church in London. I went there the first time and they did this very odd thing at the church. They'd stand up and they'd start singing. And they'd start doing sign language in the church.

And for me, it was an absolute bizarre thing to look at. I was shocked by it. I didn't know what was going on. I thought it was a bit naff, to be honest. Until I found out that the reason why they do that is because one of the members had thyroid cancer and her vocal cords was broken.

So the way that she sung was to do makaton, do deaf sign language. And the church, as a family, in seeking to love one another, had adopted this custom of doing sign language and makaton to love others well.

And the reason that the kingdom of God is not about what we do, but about others, is because, and this is the second thing to remember about the kingdom of God, is that the kingdom of God is about freedom and grace.

[9 : 56] Verse 16 there. So I'll just read it for us. Maybe look down. Therefore, do not let what you know is good, i.e., all that Christian freedom that you enjoy, all that grace that you've been told about, be spoken of, of evil.

And the point is this, that rules don't mean a thing. Being a Christian is all about grace. And nothing you do or say or eat or drink will bring you closer to God.

And nothing you do or say or eat or drink will take you further away from God. And because rules are pointless, don't turn your freedom and grace into rules for others.

I hope you can see the irony in that. Having been set free from rules, why would you go back to keeping them as an expression of your freedom?

And therefore, don't set rules for others, whether explicitly or implicitly. And don't look down on others. Don't judge them for what they do or don't.

[11 : 03] But serve one another in love. And here is the thing. If you turn to grace and freedom into a rule and you say stuff like, oh, you must be free, you must behave like this, then what will happen is people will resent you for that.

And more importantly, they will resent the freedom and grace of the kingdom of God is about. You see, the great gift of the kingdom is freedom and grace.

That you don't have to do stuff to be right with God. That God has made you right with them. And so, if we turn that freedom and grace into something people resent, well, then we're running down the good news of the gospel.

We're running down that kingdom of grace. You see, God's grace is big enough to cover our faults and it's big enough to cover the faults of our friends and our family when through their cultural baggage they carry, they don't see that freedom as clearly as perhaps they should.

And so, as we live together as a church family, we need to remember to treat people where they are at, where they have come from, and not where we think they should be. So, silly illustration.

[12 : 11] Before coming to St. Silas, I had a, I used to help out at an after school club, little youngsters, 7 to 11, I think, and it would have been pointless for me to teach them the Bible and insist, oh, you must know the Apostles' Creed or you must know the Ten Commandments.

That would have been ridiculous. I was simply happy if they said, thank you, Jesus, for saving me and didn't punch one another. In my book, that was a win.

So, I'm judging them where they are at. And we need this love, we need to love others, and we need to remember that the kingdom of God is about grace. Because, and this is the third thing to remember about God's kingdom, and that is, it's all about people.

People, people, people, glorious people, one another. We're a gift to one another. So, look what he says in verse 22. So, whatever you believe about these things, keep between yourself and God.

And what's he saying there? He's saying, if you feel enlightened, if you feel mature in the gospel, if you think you arrived, then thank God for that.

[13 : 20] But don't burden others with your wisdom in an unhelpful manner. And I wonder if you followed that Twitter storm recently about people giving unsolicited advice to pregnant mothers, including obstetricians and gynecologists, and telling them how they should be pregnant and mother, it's unwanted advice.

You shouldn't give that. Don't be tempted to give that. And that's the non-spiritual equivalent of speaking wisely into people's lives in an unwise way without them asking.

So, what is he going to say at the start of chapter 15, verse 1 and 2? He says, we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not please ourselves.

Each of us should please our neighbors. What? for their good and to build them up. Therefore, whatever we do and say, we should look to build people up.

We should look to build others up. And one way that we might build others up is through the careful use of our words. So, what that means is we don't, I don't, hopefully you'll get this expression, we don't snipe at one another.

[14 : 32] And sniping is really a sarky way of speaking to one another. And it comes from that expression to snipe, sniper, sniping. And I have it on good authority that where it comes from is when if you go out and you go out hunting or something like that, back in the day, there's some birds that just fly and they're quite steady and they're quite easy to follow.

And then there is the snipe. And it's a ratic, crazy bird that just flies out from this side, flies out from that side. And if you want to get it, you have to be a top shot and invariably you find yourself blazing all over the show.

And the point is we shouldn't use our words as if we were sniping pot shots. We shouldn't be firing pot shots at snipes because what will happen is we'll end up shooting ourself, we'll end up shooting our neighbors, we'll end up shooting everything but the place where we intend to.

It's an unwise way of using our words. And what is so important in that we remember all this about the kingdom of God is that the kingdom of God is God's great work in the world.

So we need to be careful. So look down at verse 20 in chapter 14. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.

[15 : 50] And the word that he uses for destroy there is talking about how you would tear down the temple in Jerusalem. And Emily's kid slot was really helpful for us in understanding this.

So who is the temple? Where does God live? How is God going to make himself known in the world that all the world might praise him and see him?

Well, it's through you and me. It's through one another. We are God's temple. We are the place where people come in and see the glory of God.

Each of us is vitally important to God's work in the world. There are no insignificant parts. None of us are unimportant. And therefore, we should look to build one another up into a glorious temple so that all people might see the glory and majesty of God.

And the way that we do this and live in God's kingdom so well, and this is our second point, slightly shorter, is that we are to accept one another as Christ accepted you.

[16 : 58] And the key verse there is verses 7 and 8. I'll just read it for us. Accept one another then just as Christ accepted you in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant on the Jews on behalf of God's truth so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed and moreover that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.

So why are we to accept one another? Because Jesus has served us. He's served due and gentle. Why? That we might glorify God in His mercy.

And we remember 12 verse 1. Therefore, in the view of God's mercy. And how does he point out how Christ has served us? Well, by showing us that he has accepted us as Lord through his, and it's a bit of a surprise, his humiliation through his going to suffer and die on the cross.

That's how Christ served us. So look at chapter 15 verse 3. And he quotes from Psalm 69 there. And it's a psalm about the righteous person who bears insults and humiliation with great endurance and hope.

So I'll read verse 3 for us. For even Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written in Psalm 69, the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.

[18 : 26] And what's he saying? He's saying that as we live as church, accepting one another, we should have the same attitude as Jesus by accepting one another. Having an attitude of humility and gentleness towards one another so that we may be united as Christians where we come from all those different places.

And notice the thing that Paul fronts for us here is Christ's humility, his sufferings at the cross. Because that's what he wants to foreground and stress on how we should treat one another with gentleness and humility.

Don't miss that. And so if we're going to bear with one another, if we're going to approach one another with humility and gentleness, then we are going to need endurance and encouragement and a sure and certain hope.

And it's an incredibly realistic thing to say because I wonder if you step back and you think about that. It's very easy for me to deal humbly and gently with people I love and enjoy.

So you think of your spouse, they're quite easy-ish most times to be humble and gentle with. You think of your kids, they have their moments, but you are generally encouraged to be gentle and humble with them.

[19 : 45] But think about someone who you're less inclined to feel humble and gentle about, whom you might look down on, who you might think, well, I think they're wrong for the most of the time and they speak off the cuff mostly.

Think of that awkward growth group member or think of, if you don't know who that is, probably you. Think of any number of situations Sunday morning after the service.

Here's a practical one for me. I'm a South African. South Africans love a barbecue. We love burvos. Chicken is a vegetable to me. But when I have my vegetarian friends over, I love them to bits, but it is really a bit of an endurance and I need a lot of encouragement and a hope of a burger afterwards.

So why do we need this encouragement to hope? Verse 5 and 6. So may the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had.

Why? So that with one mind and one voice you might glorify God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So what is he saying?

[20 : 57] He's saying, so that we may use our judgment, our wisdom, our minds, not to judge one another, but that we might be united for God's glory, accepting one another just as Christ accepted us in order to bring praise to God and humbleness.

And so why is unity so important? Well, from verse 8 to the end of the chapter, Paul spells out how unity is integral to God's plan to show his rule over the whole world, of how he brings the whole world in, due and gentle, under his lordship, under Jesus' lordship, that all people might love and adore their creator.

Now, as we finish, I thought we might reflect on how Jesus has allowed himself to be humiliated and why he went through that. So, Psalm 69, we read of his humiliation in verses 19 to 21.

I'll just read it for us. You know how I am scorned, disgraced, shamed, all my enemies are before you. Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless.

I looked for sympathy, but there was none. For comforters, but I found none. They put gall in my food. They gave me vinegar for my thirst. Why would Jesus go through that?

[22 : 20] Well, the psalmist answers that question earlier on in the psalm, in verse 6 and 7, he says, the Lord, the Lord Almighty, may those who hope in you not be disgraced because of me.

God of Israel, may those who seek you not be put to shame because of me. For I endured scorn for your sake and shame covers my face. So why does Jesus go through that humiliation?

Well, he goes through it for you and for me. He was disgraced and shamed that we might not be disgraced and shamed on that final day.

And so, rather, the end of the psalm paints this picture of how Jesus has prepared a place for us in that glorious heavenly kingdom with Jesus.

And the psalmist ends off the psalm, let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and all that move in them, for God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah. Then people will settle there and possess it.

[23 : 20] The children of his servants will inherit it and those who love his name will dwell there. And it's a place where all people will be united with God in his glory.

So as Jesus died on the cross, he served us dying and taking away our disgrace and our shame. He served us in carrying insults and shame and humbling himself that we might be fully accepted by God into the kingdom.

And as we come into his kingdom, he asks us to serve one another, humbly accepting each other, warts and all in all that we do and say.

What great news, what a great kingdom to be a part of. Let me pray for us as we close. So, Father, we thank you for family.

We thank you for one another. We thank you that we would love you in everything. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[24 : 32] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.